



განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების ეროვნული ცენტრი
NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Final Report on Kutaisi University Authorization

Expert Panel Members

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Authorization Report Resume

General information on the educational institution

Kutaisi University (hereafter „KU“, „the university“ or „the institution“) was founded in 1991 as Kutaisi Institute of Law and Economics. Established as a private higher education institution on the basis of Kutaisi State University, it later developed into Kutaisi Institute of Law and Economics. In 1992 its status changed due to the scope of the degree programs it offered and it became Kutaisi University of Law and Economics. At the time Kutaisi University delivered programs in the areas of law, economics, information technologies and foreign languages. In 2010, the university changed its name to „Kutaisi University“.

Since the end of 2015, the institution started a process of evaluating the effectiveness of its internal structure activity. Based on this analysis, new regulations and guidelines were developed, based on which a fundamentally renewed organizational structure was adopted by the end of 2017: new provisions of structural units as well as staff job descriptions according to the renewed list of positions were developed in order to improve the management of the university, clear separation of the rights and responsibilities of the staff, distribution of responsibilities among the senior managers - all of this eventually reflected the requirements of the new structure and normative base.

Since 1996, the institution has been functioning in the central part of the city of Kutaisi in a 6-store building with classrooms, a library, computer labs, a language centre, halls for conferences, drama and art activities.

Currently there is one faculty at the university – the Faculty of Social Sciences, which implements educational programs for all three levels of academic higher education (Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees).

Brief overview of the authorization site visit

The site visit to Kutaisi University was conducted by the panel nominated by the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement, hereafter NCEQE. The agenda of the site visit was drafted jointly by the KU and NCEQE. During the site visit taking place during 3-5 of July 2018, the experts confirmed the information provided by KU in the self-evaluation documentation and explored in meetings and interviews the perceptions of the internal and external stakeholders; based on these main aspects, the panel assessed the compliance of KU with NCEQE institutional authorization standards.

The panel was very pleased to be welcomed by a very open attitude; it was evident that the institution did everything that was in its power to offer the panel the best environment (by providing access to both individuals and documents) so that the panel can produce a realistic and well-grounded report that will, eventually, support the development of the institution.

In particular, as commented during the site visit, the panel appreciated the self-analytical and self-critical capacity of the institution, reflected not only in its self-evaluation documentation, but also in the attitudes of most interviewees the panel has met.

Overview of the HEI's compliance with standards

The mission statement of the institution is as follows:

- to ensure the attractive work environment for teaching and learning at all three levels of academic higher education in order to promote the development of academic personnel and students and to stimulate their creative potential;
- to prepare the highly qualified and competent specialists in business, economics, tourism and law by creating and disseminating practical and theoretical knowledge relevant to the dynamic labour market requirements;

- to prepare highly-qualified and competent economists with civic consciousness and the ability to make adequate decisions in critical situations;
- to bring up a new generation with the ability to make optimal decisions in critical situations, honest, with the high sense of civic self-consciousness who appreciate the national and universal values by recognizing and evaluating their unique individual peculiarities;
- to develop the harmonious co-operation between academic and administrative staff and the students and graduates based on long-term, mutual respect.
- to satisfy the educational and advisory requirements of the community, implement the applied and fundamental research of regional, national and international importance.

The mission reflects the main areas the institution provides study programs in, as well as the institution's understanding of its role in developing active members of the society. However, the mission statement does not define the role of the institution locally, nationally and internationally. The panel was also surprised by the long format of the mission, which is not a specific feature in the global higher education landscape, and which makes it difficult for the academic community to identify itself with the mission statement. Also, the panel believes that the mission could easily be transferred to any higher education institution in the world; the mission statement should be revised so that to present to the internal and external community what distinguishes KU from other universities. The institution adopted a 7 year strategic development plan (2018 - 2024) developed by the University Strategic Planning Committee and which, according to the SER, „represents the university road map for the implementation of its priority goals for the period up to 2025". The six strategic goals cover the whole range of institutional activities. However, it is not clear to the panel how exactly are the most pressing needs determined. The institution has drafted and adopted a Strategic Planning Methodology which describes all the necessary stages of the strategic planning process and the instrument including monitoring and periodic evaluations. Staff across the academic community recognise the strategic plan and believe that the plan reflects their priorities; however, external stakeholders are not familiar with the strategic plan and had no role in determining the institutional priorities. The institution understands its social responsibility across the community within which it operates by providing trainings for schools teachers and the local municipality, applied research, public lectures, by ensuring that the research conducted at the university is being rolled out through public schools, their own lecturers and municipality employees, gaining insight from local employers in order to understand their educational needs.

The two upper management bodies of the institution are the General Meeting of Partners and the Academic Council. On a more operational level, the institution is led by the Rector and the Director. The procedures for appointment or election in the management bodies of the university are outlined in the Statute and Internal Regulations. The rector and the director of the university are appointed by the General Meeting of Partners, provision regulated by the statute of the institution. The Dean is elected by the Faculty Board. The Faculty Council is a representative body that unifies the entire academic staff of the faculty, except those of the academic staff who are members of the representative bodies of the higher education institution or administrative officials, including student representatives. In terms of administration, the functions and responsibilities of some of these structural units are not distributed in the most logical way and sometimes the roles and responsibilities for the structural units dedicated to student administration are also lacking coherence. The panel is also concerned that some individuals across the organization are not equipped with the necessary qualifications in order to fulfil their responsibilities effectively and in a professional manner. The institution does not generally use modern technologies for its governance, administration, student support, or an electronic document processing system. There is no systematic process of having internal policies and procedures revised so that to ensure they stay current with the legislative framework and internal developments and the institution does not have a legal department. The institution prides itself to be „among the top ten universities of Georgia and number one among private universities according to the total number of the EU funded grant projects the institution has taken part in. In total, the university participated in 8 projects on institutional development and in 3 projects on mobility, three of which are in progress". However, the panel believes that KU is not effectively utilizing internationalization results in the work of the institution.

The main responsibility for internal quality assurance across the organization lies with the Quality Assurance Office. However, the office and its management are completely unfit for the key role an internal quality assurance unit is expected to play in a higher education institution: the institution does not have a Quality Assurance policy; the

institution has no notion of self-evaluation in order to reflect on the quality of its operations, such processes are not conducted unless they are triggered by an upcoming authorisation/accreditation; the institution conducts surveys amongst its students, staff, alumni and employers, but the instruments are generally not fit for purpose; many institutional processes are informal, which means that they risk to disappear when people in certain institutional position are changing; the office currently has a mix of responsibilities, some of them unfit, while it lacks the autonomy of creating its own quality instruments; the staff in the QA Office is not fit to fulfil their role and the office does not have sufficient informational resources to conduct its activity; the performance review system is unclear in both documentation and practice; students are not engaged in the internal quality assurance processes as they only serve as a source of feedback; there is little evidence that evaluation results are used for further development of the activities and that the leadership of the institution makes decisions based on the results of quality assurance.

According to the SER and the Strategic development plan, „honesty or sincerity of intention” is part of the KU values, which means that „good faith and high ethical standards define all the activities carried out by the university in accomplishing its educational, scientific and research missions; the university will ensure the protection of this values in the study and teaching process through the detection of plagiarism and start reaction toward it”. The institution has developed a Code of Ethics for the academic and administrative staff, as well as Rules of the Student Code of Ethics. However, the institutional values and the provisions of the regulatory documents are not sufficiently or properly promoted across the academic community. There are no instruments in place to detect plagiarism as the institution is relying that it will be the teachers themselves that can identify plagiarism in students’ work, projects and thesis; there is no provision that the academic staff is obliged or even recommended to submit student work in freely available plagiarism detection software. Students involved in research, even for the purpose of their thesis, are not following any process to confirm if their activity is conducted according to ethical rules: signed consent forms for all human subjects, ensuring confidentiality of research data, etc. The institution has not created appropriate units and bodies in charge with observing and safeguarding ethical principles in research.

At present, the institution delivers 6 study programmes: 3 bachelor programmes (Business Administration, Economics, Tourism Management), 2 master programmes (Finance, Banking and Insurance and Accounting and Audit) and 1 doctoral programme (Economics). In order to maintain the competitiveness of the university in the higher education market and to provide the society with high quality, market-oriented and modern education programmes, the HEI is updating and improving its programmes on a regular basis. The procedures of planning, development, implementation and development of the programmes are outlined in the University Internal Regulations, which includes clear steps of initiation, expertise, approving and revoking programmes as well as amendments in the curriculum of the current educational programmes. The university staff are well aware of the procedure for planning, designing, implementing and developing educational programmes. The academic staff, as a direct participant in the study programmes, regularly delivers its suggestions and recommendations to appropriate programme leaders and committees. Their opinions are valuable for further improvement of the programmes. In order to attain the programmes’ main goals, the institution uses different types of questionnaires and surveys involving the students, employers and graduates; however, the panel believes that the potential of these instruments is not valued as there are several implementation flaws. Also, employers and external stakeholders are not involved in a holistic review of the programmes.

The undergraduate study programmes cover 240 credits - combination of basic specialty (120 credits including elective credits), additional specialty (there are three additional programmes applicable to the main programme (Business Administration, Economics and Tourism Management - 60 credits including elective credits) and free components (60 credits). Students can choose free components according to their interests, taking into consideration the prerequisites of the training requirements. The master programmes cover 120 credits, including elective courses - 10 credits and master's thesis - 25 credits. The doctoral programme includes at least 180 credits; the total amount of educational components does not exceed 60 credits, including 10 elective credits. Programme components are well-structured; the sequence of components in the programme and the prerequisites for accessing the component is logical. The university has developed a very detailed and well-organised subject syllabus for each programme. Each syllabus contains course objectives, intended learning outcomes, teaching methods used to achieve the learning outcomes, detailed description of weekly content, corresponding literature, individual work, assessment methods for each component of assessment work, the clear criteria linking student

achievement to grades and suggested literature. The learning outcomes for the educational programme are based on the objectives of the programme and include basic knowledge, skills and competences provided by the programme content. They correspond to the relevant level of higher education and the qualifications awarded. The learning outcomes of the programme clearly describe what the students can do after completing the programmes. Learning Outcomes of the programmes are stated explicitly and clearly in accordance with the six criteria of the Georgian NQF and it is possible to measure their achievement. The scope of the programmes provides proper breadth of theoretical and practical knowledge. The information posted on the institutional website about each academic programme - teaching plan and the catalogue of programmes with brief information about programmes and relevant contact details - is outdated and needs renewal.

Learning outcomes (LOs) are a combination of competencies determining what a student/graduate is expected to know, understand and be able to do by applying this knowledge on completion of the academic process or any of its stages. The objective of assessing the level of students' learning outcomes is to qualitatively determine the relevance of students' learning results to the goals and parameters of academic higher education programs and to the one of the component of the mission of the university. The university has a clear policy for the assessment of students' learning outcomes. The level of learning outcomes of any component of the programme is evaluated for each student individually through midterm and final assessment forms. Each form of evaluation includes one or several components of the evaluation that determine the methods of assessing the student's knowledge, skills and competences. General evaluation criteria, which are described in the program description document, are tailored to each course and explained in exhaustive detail in the relevant syllabus. The teaching staff provides feedback to students after each assignment. Teaching staff is easily accessible to discuss any questions students might have about their grades and provide clarifications. Students are most of the time satisfied with the feedback they receive from their teachers.

The institution has a comprehensive manual on human resource management that covers the main areas of staff management: needs assessment, recruitment, selection, assessment, motivation, professional development. The fourth strategic goal in the KU strategic plan is the development of human resources. The strategic objectives designed to support the institution in reaching this goal are the improvement of HR management mechanisms and the improvement of the quantitative and qualitative indicators of personnel. Kutaisi University has 105 employees, out of them 26 serve on academic positions. The number of affiliated academic staff is 16. The university has 49 invited lecturers. The number of administrative and support staff amounts 46; teacher/student ratios are satisfactory with the current number of students enrolled at the institution. The university has transparent procedures for hiring academic and invited, as well as administrative staff. The function distribution between the personnel seems generally blurred, while the basic tasks assigned to some positions are either overlapping or illogical and the staff required for some positions do not always have the required qualifications. The systems in place for performance review, professional development and the resources allocated to these two are in need of immediate and special attention.

The institution has adopted an academic workload scheme for academic and invited personnel that is a part of the "Guidance for Implementation of Academic Programs". According to these provisions, the academic workload of teaching staff during the academic year should not exceed 1000 hours. Academic workload implies lectures/practices of the course during the academic year and pre-exam consultations, as well as contact hours with students and workload at other HEIs. The academic staff defines their primary affiliation to the institution based on the affiliation agreement. Affiliation terms and conditions are defined in a formal agreement between academic staff and Kutaisi University. The institution has defined realistic and achievable target benchmarks for its academic and invited personnel and estimated date of reaching each benchmark. The student body planning methodology includes qualitative parameters of human resources such as qualification and experience of people implementing the program components and also functions they should perform according to the relevant position; the quantitative parameters, like the number of academic or visiting professors, are not dependent on the size of the student body.

The institution has adopted regulations for the assignment, termination, suspension and mobility of students which are written in a proper and clear way, as well as information for granting scholarships and financial support. These documents are made publicly available on the university website and generally known to students. The written appeals system provides regulations relating to examination grades only. Both students and teachers are

aware of these written procedures. However, the appeal system does not cover the grades on other continuous assessments such as quizzes or presentation. It was the perspective of the academic staff the panel has seen during the visit that students can talk to the teachers directly and negotiate on their grading. The institution has a high number of suspended and low attendance of students. However, the panel did not find evidence to indicate a systematic approach of institutional investigations into the root of these two problems so that to support the solution finding process. Students are generally aware of the provisions relating to their rights and interests such as ethics code, their rights and obligations, appeals procedure, as well as terms of agreement with the institution. However, the sanctions in case of ethical breaches should be better communicated and explained to students as they are not aware of, for example, the consequences in case of plagiarism.

Students receive consultation and support on the planning of education process and improvement of academic performance through their teachers which are always accessible and show a readiness to communicate. The institution provides students' career support advice through its PR and Marketing department, which conducts regular trainings related to the labour market. The university has good career development activities and strong connections with employers. Information about employers is publicly available and students gradually receive news on available vacancies through their email. While employers and stakeholders are engaged with the university in terms of internships employment opportunities and feedback being sought from them through a survey, the external partners are not engaged in program development in a more holistic way so that to ensure that the study programs continue to respond to the needs of the labour market and to be fit for employment requirements. The institution regularly conducts surveys amongst its students and alumni regarding their personal, professional and academic development. However, the surveys themselves are not structured well enough to provide sufficient detail that would serve as a basis for improvement, and they leave out some areas of major concern for students. Also, there isn't always evidence of having feedback from the university. The Institution has different forms of financial support in place, but there are no specific written criteria and step-by-step procedures to describe how the university evaluates students to be granted different kind of scholarships and financial support. There is no system that regulates granting financial support for academic grounds separated from social grounds. The institution uses very little technology support in the area of student management and administration, with no platform or IT support. The university does not have an electronic system for centralising grades and uploading learning materials. The institution supports student involvement in international conferences and exchange programs as well as extracurricular and other student initiatives, which students are generally satisfied with. The university has special flexible payment method for the low SES student, and the student's need is evaluated only by examining the financial condition of student's family. However, there are no specific written criteria and step-by-step procedures to describe how the university evaluates students to be granted different kind of scholarships and financial support, and what criteria do students have to meet in order to keep their scholarships. Except this flexible payment method, the university does not have other options to support students in order to help them through education.

One of the main directions of the institutional activities is to conduct scientific and applied research, as also confirmed through the mission statement of the university: "to satisfy the educational and consulting needs of the community, to implement applied and fundamental research of regional, national and international importance". However, when asked about the strategy and principles of determining the said „importance“, the management of the institution could not clarify the process of priority setting beyond the local reach where, presumably, the institution knows „what problems there are in the region“. Despite the fact that the university states that its mission is to carry out applied and fundamental research of the regional, national and international importance, unfortunately, the areas of research are mostly limited to and focused on finding ways for the development of the region of Imereti and the subject of scientific research is limited to theoretical and practical problems of the region's economic and social development. The findings and results achieved within the framework of the projects are valuable information for local governments in developing strategic development goals and objectives of the region. Except for local funds and grants, the university has been involved as a partner in the implementation of 8 applied research projects funded by the EU during the last 10 years, even though there are concerns around the effective use of internationalization outcomes for institutional improvements. The university ensures the effectiveness of doctoral research supervision by clearly defined functions of the doctorate/research supervisor, which are determined in the Guidelines for Implementation of Academic Higher Education Educational

Programmes. The PhD programme in economics does not envisage teaching of “Research Methodology” as a separate subject.

The university has no clear strategic plan for its research activity. It is not clear how are the research trends and priorities selected; the system seems to be rather chaotic and depending on the obtained grants. Also, the funds allocated by the university in support of the research activities are not sufficient and depend mostly on the external funding. The institution supports its academic staff and students to conduct scientific research activities by offering an appropriate material and technical base, encouraging them to present papers at scientific conferences and financing or co-financing publication of scientific papers. The rules of coordinating, supporting, financing and performing scientific activities are defined by the University Internal Regulations Document. In addition to the internal grants, the university supports the academic staff in raising funds from different external sources to conduct research and improve research infrastructure. The university staff and students have participated in different conferences and seminars organised within the framework of international projects and attended short-term training courses in foreign partner universities. However, there is very little utilization of internationalization results in the work of the institution.

The Quality Assurance Office conducts the evaluation of scientific research activities in two directions: the evaluation of the activities conducted by the university as an institution and the evaluation of the scientific productivity of the academic staff. The research conducted in 2017 revealed that the number of defended dissertations has increased compared to the previous 2 years and amounted to 43% of all defended dissertations. There is a decrease in all other indicators. None of the academic staff representatives published articles in peer reviewed or impact-factor journals. The university has developed a clear and transparent scoring system to assess the productivity of the staff’s scientific research activity. The special forms developed by Quality Assurance Service and filled by the academic staff on their scientific activities were presented to the experts during the site-visit. The scientific productivity evaluation results are sent to each staff member separately. The evaluation results revealed that the number of papers indexed by Thomson Reuters Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar is very low; local publications have quite high indicators; the indicator of receiving internal and international grants is also satisfactory. The university ensures the effectiveness of doctoral research supervision by clearly defined functions of the doctorate/research supervisor, which are determined in the Guidelines for Implementation of Academic Higher Education Educational Programmes. The “Guidance for Implementation of Academic Higher Education Educational Programs in LLC Kutaisi University” define gradual and consistent processes that build a systematisation of the doctoral research process, presentation of intermediate research reports and the supervisor’s regular feedback to the student.

Kutaisi University possesses a 6-store building located in the center of Kutaisi which corresponds to the requirements for implementing the educational programmes and research activities with the existing student body. The total area of the institution building is 2632.72 square meters, out of which 1149.44 square meters are used for academic purposes and 1110.43 square meters are dedicated to auxiliary areas. The material resources are generally sufficient for achieving the goals stated in the institutional mission. The building is equipped with foyer, recreation spaces, classrooms for teaching and learning activities, administrative offices, a library, archive, auditoriums, laboratories and a first aid cabinet. The university premises are under 24-hour supervision of the security service. The building and the yard are covered by CCTV systems and has an automatic system of fire alarm. The medical aid cabinet is equipped and supplied with the necessary first aid items. There is a pleasant green environment in the yard where students and staff can relax or carry out various activities. However, during the visit of the facilities, the panel could observe several challenges across the institutional facilities and their equipment’s which can represent an inconvenience at the working and learning environment, which have the potential to influence the educational activities.

The institution has a library located on the second floor of Kutaisi University, which consists of the book storage and open areas where those interested can consult the educational resources. The library resources include more than 12000 items, with different subjects; among them 5724 are Georgian, 1509 Russian, 1158 English and 992 electronic. 6224 GEL were spent for obtaining new library resources. The budget for 2018 budget also includes an allocation dedicated to purchase new books and resources. In the open area of the library are also 5 computers connected to internet and a printer/scanner/photocopier, where students can access international library resources as well. However, when students were asked to find the materials in the online library, they were not

familiar with how to operate with the existing international material resources. The open area of the library is insufficient to accommodate different learning and studying needs; this matter should therefore be addressed. The library is open to the public every day except Sundays and legal holidays, from 9:00 to 17:00, according to the rules established by the Library Regulations. The library can be used not only by the staff members, students or listeners, but also by the general members of the community. However, the library does not have clear regulations relating to the loans system: there are no clear sanctions on failure to return the books in the specified time. There is no security system in place to prevent loss of materials, which again is of particular concern since the library resources are available to the general public as well. The library has an electronic system for books accounting, which can be accessed on site and offline, but this system is in need of substantial improvement.

The university electronic infrastructure contains approximately 100 computers permanently connected to internet, which are regularly checked. Since 2011, there has been a 40% increase in quantity of computers, but a 80% upgrade to the existing systems. All computers are equipped with an antivirus program provided by Information Technology Support Service. The wireless internet network is currently covering only 20-30% of the institutional premises. The institution has a functional web-page in Georgian which provides comprehensive information about the institution and its programs; however, the English version is severely underdeveloped and provides no relevant information. There is no electronic student management system, no centralised assessment system, no platform to centrally host all educational resources related to the study programs at the institution, no internal administration electronic system (that would also provide hosting to all surveys conducted by the QA office) and no modern library electronic management system. Therefore, the current IT infrastructure fails to ensure the effectiveness, efficiency and accessibility of the management and educational processes at the institution. There is no evidence of the efficiency of information system being evaluated.

The budget of Kutaisi University has been prepared according to the university strategic plan with the involvement of its constituent structural units. The financial resources provided by the budget are economically viable. The income of the university is based on student tuition fees for the study programs, international fund grants, tuition fees for certification programs, as well as other sources from different economic activities. The revenue of the institution has decreased during the last five years, but the current situation is stable enough for the actual operations and the defined strategic goals. The university has a good financial position as the accumulated profit amounts to approximately 20% of the budget. The expenses are planned optimally. Income and cash flows can cover the current and planned expenses for the successful implementation of the core activities of the institution. The costs are linked to strategic priorities and are leaving room for future development. Expenses are planned along with planning budget revenues. In spite of the optimal resource allocation, the institution needs a faster financial growing. According to the meetings conducted by the panel, the institution plans to improve the revenues of the organization and, consequently, increase the funding for organisational development.

Summary of Recommendations

- Adjust the format of the mission statement so that it is concise, specific, distinguishable, realistic, and forward-looking;
- Ensure the mission statement defines the role of the university locally and/or internationally;
- Increase the dissemination of the institutional mission across the academic community, especially among students;
- Ensure the strategic and action plans remain the management instruments that the name suggests so that to keep them fit for purpose: the strategic plan sets the strategic direction, goals and objectives, while the action plan details all actions to be taken in order to achieve all strategic goals and objectives;
- Ensure a clear prioritisation strategy that is being followed up consistently, both in terms of strategic planning, as well as in allocating timelines to individual actions;
- Ensure the effectiveness of the monitoring and reporting of the strategic plan achievements, as well as taking corrective actions, if applicable;
- Ensure that students are represented in all strategic, decisional, consultative and executive bodies, as well as in all quality assurance processes, and that the elections are organized independently, openly and

democratically, without limiting students right to vote and be elected, regardless of their academic performance;

- Ensure the regularity of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of higher management structures;
- Revisit the organization structure taking into consideration optimization of upper management and administrative units;
- Increase the clarity of the functions and responsibilities of the structural units of the institution so that they implement their functions effectively and in a coordinated manner;
- Ensure that positions across the organisation chart are occupied by individuals with the right qualifications that would allow them to fulfil their duties in an effective and professional manner;
- Establish and follow a systematic process of having internal policies and procedures revised;
- Ensure that the internationalization strategy is known at least to people whose work is expected to be derived from and guided by such document; ideally, such document should be drafted through a comprehensive consultation process;
- Increase the use of modern technologies and IT support in institutional governance, administration, student support and in an electronic document processing system;
- Increase the utilization of internationalization results in the work of the institution, as detailed above, including through more structured, coordinated and targeted MoUs;
- Identify based on clear criteria similar international higher education institutions to benchmark institutional processes against;
- Increase the English language proficiency of both staff and students;
- Develop and adopt a comprehensive policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of its strategic management, as detailed above;
- Formalize and conduct regular self-evaluation processes and reporting to allow the institution to reflect on the quality of its own operations;
- Revise the tasks and responsibilities of the Quality Assurance Office so that to relocate some of its responsibilities to more relevant units;
- Ensure that the instruments used for data/feedback collection are fit for purpose, user friendly, inclusive (non-discriminatory of student level and academic performance) and cover all areas of concern for students and staff;
- Develop the internal Quality Assurance system so that it is centralised, formal, clear, consistent and implemented on a continuous basis;
- Ensure that the human resources allocated to the institutional quality assurance work is qualified and competent to fulfil their duties;
- Acquire and implement an integrated Management Information System to aggregate all the quality make it readily available to support decision making;
- Clarify, centralize and disseminate the staff performance review system;
- Increase student participation in quality assurance processes;
- Ensure the regularity of all surveys, consistency of the platform for conduction and ensure the transparency of results;
- Standardize the revision of the quality assurance instruments and safeguard the comparability of data;
- Better disseminate the relevant ethical regulations so that to make them more accessible to the academic community;
- Develop effective mechanisms to detect plagiarism and theft of intellectual property by seeking technological solutions and software programs instead of relying on the human factor;
- Ensure a process of approval of students' research methodology so that to safeguard research ethics before such research is being conducted;
- Ensure that initiation of new programs and adjustments in the existing ones are based on market research data;
- Increase the response rate in student surveys and ensure the respondents reflect the diversity of the general student body;

- Revisit surveys so that to ensure that questions are more fit for purpose and provide sufficient detail to support decision making at program level;
- Increase the interaction with alumni; promote their involvement in programme/faculty, academic and social activities and select individuals that can be formally involved in programme development;
- Integrate local employers, members of professions and stakeholders in appropriate structural units considering new and existing study programmes;
- Promote students, alumni and employers involvement in programmes development by reflecting their feedback in the programmes;
- Develop and implement a clear system for measuring the load of training components through which the credits are awarded to each subject and revise the number of credits currently awarded;
- Ensure that the university website includes an updated individual programmes presentation, as well as an all-programmes catalogue in an accessible location;
- Develop and implement an electronic learning process management system not only for facilitation of students to choose subjects but also to improve teaching and learning process;
- Increase the funding allocated to the HR strategic objective in order to achieve the targets the institution has set for itself;
- Develop qualification requirements of staff according to their job descriptions;
- Ensure that functions distribution among staff falls within the authority of the relevant structural units and is not influenced by the background and experience of certain individuals;
- Increase the staff development prioritisation by developing a clear process of identifying the professional development needs of staff, invest more resources into staff development and assess the impact of professional development sessions;
- Ensure that staff performance evaluation is implemented in a coherent, centralised and transparent manner and that it serves as a basis for continuous improvement in the activity of both academic and administrative staff;
- Implement the performance based remuneration system;
- Elaborate effective mechanisms in order to regulate and manage staff workload and monitor how the workload scheme affects the productivity of the relevant staff;
- Increase student engagement in the quality enhancement at program level, as well as in terms of teaching methodology, appeals procedures, etc;
- Improve student representation by achieving their role in institutional bodies – representing student rights and interests – as opposed to only ensuring support for extracurricular activities; ensure an effective bi-directional communication between students and their elected representatives;
- Address the issue of the very high number of students with suspended status/low attendance in a structured and systematic way, taking into consideration all the threats that this situation might be related to;
- Ensure that the provisions in the Code of Ethics, including the sanctions in case of breaches are better disseminated to students;
- Discussing with students and their elected representatives any modification to their agreement with the institution before any amendments are made;
- Further increase the internationalisation at the institution by supplementing the number of exchanges students are part of and the number of English language courses;
- Increase the transparency of the financial support for students by developing clear descriptions of procedures and processes in place for this purposes;
- Develop more fit-for-purpose criteria for providing financial support to student, based on their academic performance and social status respectively;
- Ensure better adapted environment and learning resources for students with special needs;
- Reorganise the structural units dedicated to student administration and support services so that they are fit for purpose and meet the needs in this area;
- Provide the academic community with all the necessary physical facilities and learning resources adapted to modern standards so as to facilitate the teaching and learning process, as detailed above;

- Increase the measures in place to support low SES students;
- Ensure a more coherent strategy of determining research priorities and focus;
- Expand the research area and focus from regional development trends to national and global level studies;
- Examine the knowledge of foreign language of PhD of candidates' more accurately during admission;
- Include more foreign language components into the doctoral program;
- Integrate a research methodology subject in the doctoral program curriculum;
- Ensure appointment of qualified professors with foreign language skills as supervisors of the doctoral programmes; Invite qualified foreign professors as a co-supervisors;
- Improve institutional provisions safeguarding ethics and integrity in research outcomes and throughout the doctoral programmes;
- Provide academic staff with specially tailored trainings in supervising PhD students;
- Develop a clear vision, priorities and strategic plan for research;
- Improve staff competencies in English language by providing or facilitating access to free training;
- Review international cooperation agreements and select active partners;
- Increase and improve the utilization of internationalization results in the work of the institution;
- Increase international mobility of students at all three educational levels, post-doctorates, academic and scientific personnel (internship abroad, other opportunities for upgrading qualification); academic staff should be directly involved in promoting teaching mobility;
- Increase the presence of foreign teachers in the delivery of the programme;
- Encourage academic staff to take part in individual/group grants' competitions;
- Develop a more sound internationalisation strategy;
- Increase the institutional involvement in applied research projects funded by international organisations;
- Equip all classrooms with whiteboard, projectors and air conditioning;
- Ensure sanitary units are not available on every floor;
- Revisit the areas dedicated to administration staff to ensure a sufficient, safe, comfortable and productive working environment for all employees;
- Ensure the institutional premises are fully adapted for students with special needs, not only through ramps and elevators available on all entrances and all floors, but also by offering learning resources fit for people with hearing and visual impairments;
- Ensure the university premises are evaluated by the entire academic community, through instruments that provide sufficient information to serve as a basis for improvement;
- Provide sufficient areas to meet different learning needs separately (individual reading and group work without disturbing each other);
- Ensure that library opening hours are stable over time and are clearly posted in public locations;
- Clarify and regulate the library policy to specify loan periods for each category of materials and members of the community, establish clear fines for exceeding the loan periods, as well as clear guidelines for renewal policy and returning materials; these should all be disseminated in visible locations;
- Ensure an efficient follow up for overdue material;
- Establish, adopt, enforce and display rules for behaviour within the library so that to ensure maintenance of an environment conducive to effective study and research;
- Establish effective security systems to prevent loss of materials in the library;
- Eliminate the paper based system and upgrade the library electronic management system so that to provide an effective record of loans and returns, as well as a clear inventory of the library resources physically available on site;
- Ensure that the library staff are sufficiently qualified and skilled in information technology so that to operate a comprehensive library electronic management system, as well as to guide students and staff through electronic resources and libraries;
- Ensure the students and staff are trained into using the electronic learning resources, journals and publications;
- Better promote the usage of the electronic learning resources during the educational process in order to broaden students' knowledge;

- Improve the wireless network coverage across the university premises;
- Ensure effective security is provided for student records. Central files containing cumulative records of student's enrolment and performance should be maintained in a secure area with back up files kept in a different and secure location, preferably in a different building or off campus;
- Develop the English version of the institutional website so that to provide the information required by NCEQE standards;
- Develop an IT infrastructure that would ensure the effectiveness, efficiency and accessibility of the management and educational processes at the institution by providing an electronic student management system, a centralised assessment system, a platform to centrally host all educational resources related to the study programs provided by the institution, an internal administration electronic system (that would also provide hosting to all surveys conducted by the QA office) and a modern library electronic management system;
- Conduct evaluations (or integrate in the present feedback collection instruments) of the efficiency of information system;
- Ensure the continuity of the IT services and action planning by recruiting a Head of the IT department;
- Better allocate financial resources to scientific activities so as to successfully support students and staff in their scientific research activities.

Summary of Suggestions

- Ensure that the mission statement promotes the institution's uniqueness;
- Ensure the academic appeals system includes grades to any formative and continuous assessment methods, not only to the final examination;
- Provide cafeteria services in the building accessible for staff and students during class time/working hours;
- Provide more incentives for research; take effective measures to promote scientific productivity;
- Increase the research output of the academic staff in international scientific journals.

Summary of the Best Practices

- Establishment of dividing lines between academic and administrative positions and functions;
- Recognizing distinguished professor by giving the title of professor emeritus and salary commitment.

Summary Table

	Standard	Complies with Requirements	Substantially complies with requirements	Partially Complies with Requirements	Does not Comply with Requirements
1.	Mission and strategic development of HEI	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.1	Mission of HEI	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	Strategic development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Organizational structure and management of HEI	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1	Organizational structure and management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2	Internal quality assurance mechanisms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3	Observing principles of ethics and integrity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Educational Programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.1	Design and development of educational programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2	Structure and content of educational programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.3	Assessment of learning outcomes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Staff of the HEI	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.1	Staff management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.2	Academic/Scientific and invited Staff workload	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Students and their support services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.1	The Rule for obtaining and changing student status, the recognition of education, and student rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.2	Student support services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Research, development and/or other creative work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.1	Research activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.2	Research support and internationalization	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.3	Evaluation of research activities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Material, information and financial resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.1	Material resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.2	Library resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.3	Information resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7.4	Financial resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature of expert panel members

1. Anca Prisacariu (Chair)



2. Ekaterine Azarashvili (Member)



3. Eka Gegeshidze (Member)

4. Tea Kasradze (Member)

5. Tinatin Pavliashvili (Member)

Compliance of the Authorization Applicant HEI with the Authorization Standard Components

1. Mission and strategic development of HEI

Mission statement of a HEI defines its role and place within higher education area and broader society. Strategic development plan of HEI corresponds with the mission of an institution, is based on the goals of the institution and describe means for achieving these goals.

1.1 Mission of HEI

Mission Statement of the HEI corresponds to Georgia's and European higher education goals, defines its role and place within higher education area and society, both locally and internationally.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

According to the SER, the mission statement of the institution is as follows:

- to ensure the attractive work environment for teaching and learning at all three levels of academic higher education in order to promote the development of academic personnel and students and to stimulate their creative potential;
- to prepare the highly qualified and competent specialists in business, economics, tourism and law by creating and disseminating practical and theoretical knowledge relevant to the dynamic labour market requirements;
- to prepare highly-qualified and competent economists with civic consciousness and the ability to make adequate decisions in critical situations;
- to bring up a new generation with the ability to make optimal decisions in critical situations, honest, with the high sense of civic self-consciousness who appreciate the national and universal values by recognizing and evaluating their unique individual peculiarities;
- to develop the harmonious co-operation between academic and administrative staff and the students and graduates based on long-term, mutual respect.
- to satisfy the educational and advisory requirements of the community, implement the applied and fundamental research of regional, national and international importance.

The panel was first and foremost surprised by the long format of the mission, which is not a specific feature in the global higher education landscape, and which makes it difficult for the academic community to identify itself with the mission statement.

The mission reflects the main areas the institution provides study programs in, as well as the institution's understanding of its role in developing active members of the society. However, the mission statement does not define the role of the institution locally, nationally and internationally; therefore, it is not clear as to where does the institution position itself, if it aspires to be of local, national or global interest, outreach and competition. The panel believes that such aspirations should be realistic and feasible, and should be included in the mission statement so as to reflect the realistic role of the institution in the Georgian higher education landscape and society.

Also, the panel believes that the mission could easily be transferred to any higher education institution in the world; the mission statement should be revised so that to present to the internal and external community what distinguishes KU from other universities.

Staff members across the institution have a general understanding and recollection of the mission statement; however, the same does not apply to students, whose view about the mission statement is very output and business oriented, where they reduce the overall mission to the objective of producing „successful graduates”.

Evidences/indicators

- Institutional mission statement;
- Self-evaluation report;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.

Recommendations:

- Adjust the format of the mission statement so that it is concise, specific, distinguishable, realistic and forward-looking;
- Ensure the mission statement defines the role of the university locally and/or internationally;
- Increase the dissemination of the institutional mission across the academic community, especially among students.

Suggestions:

- Ensure that the mission statement promotes the institution’s uniqueness.

Evaluation

- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☒ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply with requirements

1.2 Strategic Development

- HEI has a strategic development (7-year) and an action plans (3-year) in place.
- HEI contributes to the development of the society, shares with the society the knowledge gathered in the institution, and facilitates lifelong learning
- HEI evaluates implementation of strategic and action plans, and duly acts on evaluation results.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The institution adopted a 7 year strategic development plan (2018 - 2024) developed by the University Strategic Planning Committee and which, according to the SER, „represents the university road map for the implementation of its priority goals for the period up to 2025”.

The strategic plan adopted by the institution has identified 6 main strategic goals, as follows:

1. Improvement of educational and research environment;
2. Implementing educational programs relevant to modern labour market requirements;
3. Improvement of learning/teaching and research quality;
4. Development of Human Resources;
5. Development of student services;
6. Quantitative growth of high potential students.

Each of the strategic goals has its corresponding 2 to 3 objectives; each objective has associated actions that would ideally allow the university to reach its objectives and goals. Given that the strategic development plan is being narrowed down to individual actions, this reduces the action plan to only a 7-pages table which determines the timeline for each activity as well as the individuals responsible for each activity. The panel is unsure about the usefulness of the action plan, considering that all the actions are already determined in the strategic development plan which has become a very detailed instrument. The panel suspects that this is also the reason why the institution presents the two plans in the same document since one became part of the other, where the action plan is simply an annex reflecting a time allocation.

The six strategic goals cover the whole range of institutional activities. However, it is not clear to the panel how exactly are the most pressing needs determined; the panel found no evidence of how did the institution choose, for example, to re-equip laboratories in 2019 and not sooner or later. When addressing the management of the

institution about the prioritisation strategy, the response did not provide in fact any clarification as „the priorities are set according to the timetable” so the panel is still puzzled about the process that has led the institution to that specific timetable.

According to the meetings conducted by the panel, staff across the academic community recognise the strategic plan and believe that the plan reflects their priorities; however, external stakeholders are not familiar with the strategic plan and had no role in determining the institutional priorities. This is an area particularly challenging especially considering that social responsibility is one of the main values of the institution, as reflected in the SER and the Strategic development plan, according to which „the university understands and recognizes its responsibility towards the public, to stakeholders and environment”.

The institution has associated to its strategic and action plans a list of target benchmarks that represent measurable indicators to each individual planned action, which sets an ideal tool for the monitoring and reporting of the institutional achievements.

The institution has drafted and adopted a Strategic Planning Methodology which describes all the necessary stages of the strategic planning process and the instrument including monitoring and periodic evaluations; however, considering that the strategic and action plans themselves are still in their inception, it is too early for the panel to evaluate the progress monitoring, the effectiveness of the accountability instrument and the institution ability to take regular corrective measures.

According to the meetings taking place during the site visit, the panel can conclude that the institution understands its social responsibility across the community within which it operates by providing trainings for schools teachers and the local municipality, applied research, public lectures, by ensuring that the research conducted at the university is being rolled out through public schools, their own lecturers and municipality employees, gaining insight from local employers in order to understand their educational needs.

Evidences/indicators

- Strategic development plan 2018 - 2024;
- Action plan 2018 - 2020;
- Self-evaluation report;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.

Recommendations:

- Ensure the strategic and action plans remain the management instruments that the name suggests so that to keep them fit for purpose: the strategic plan sets the strategic direction, goals and objectives, while the action plan details all actions to be taken in order to achieve all strategic goals and objectives;
- Ensure a clear prioritisation strategy that is being followed up consistently, both in terms of strategic planning, as well as in allocating timelines to individual actions;
- Ensure the effectiveness of the monitoring and reporting of the strategic plan achievements, as well as taking corrective actions, if applicable.

Evaluation

- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☒ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply with requirements

2. Organizational Structure and Management of HEI

Organizational structure and management of the HEI is based on best practices of the educational sector, meaning effective use of management and quality assurance mechanisms in the management process. This approach ensures implementation of strategic plan, integration of quality assurance function into management process, and promotes principles of integrity and ethics

2.1 Organizational Structure and Management

- Organizational structure of HEI ensures implementation of goals and activities described in its strategic plan

- Procedures for election/appointment of the management bodies of HEI are transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation
- HEI's Leadership/Management body ensures effective management of the activities of the institution
- Considering the mission and goals of HEI, leadership of the HEI supports international cooperation of the institution and the process of internationalization.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

According to the Organizational Structure of LLC Kutaisi University, the two upper management bodies of the institution are the General Meeting of Partners and the Academic Council. On a more operational level, the institution is led by the Rector and the Director (vacant position at the time of the site visit). According to the SER, „the rights and responsibilities of the General Meeting and Academic Council are defined by the Statute and Regulations of the Company; the direct and representative rights and responsibilities of the Director and Rector are defined by the Statute and Regulations of the Company”.

The procedures for appointment or election in the management bodies of the university are outlined in the Statute and Internal Regulations. The rector and the director of the university are appointed by the General Meeting of Partners, provision regulated by the statute of the institution.

The composition of the Academic Council is also regulated by the KU statute and is made of the rector and 6 members elected for 4 years. The rule of selection in the Academic Council is clear and transparent, provided in the internal regulations of the institution.

The Dean is elected by the Faculty Board. The Faculty Council is a representative body that unifies the entire academic staff of the faculty, except those of the academic staff who are members of the representative bodies of the higher education institution or administrative officials, including student representatives. Students constitute 25% of the board members. According to the SER, „students are elected as Faculty Board members by the Faculty of from Bachelor's, Master's and PhD programs on the basis of direct, free and equal elections with secret ballot”. However, during the site visit the panel has learned that in fact students do have to meet a certain academic performance in order to run for elections. The panel is unsure whether there is a mismatch between the regulated provisions and their implementation, or a difference of perception between the institutional management and students. Additionally, whilst students have the „right and the opportunity to participate in all processes of making and discussing decisions which are connected with the university development strategy, teaching, financing student activities, teaching quality assurance” (according to the argumentative position of KU), they are not full and permanent members in all institutional structures (such as the Academic Council). We will, therefore, like to remind the university that according to article 43 of the Law of Georgia on Higher Education students shall have the right to elect a representative and be elected as a member of the students' self-government body, as well as of the management bodies of the higher education institution and its main educational units on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot, as provided for by the statute of the higher education institution. Moreover, the European Ministers responsible for Higher Education described (in their Prague Communiqué, 2001) students as “competent, active and constructive partners” in the establishment and shaping of EHEA. Students should be involved in all strategic, decisional, consultative and executive bodies, as well as in all quality assurance processes, while the student representation should be organized in line with general practice, as reflected in the pillars of the student movement published by the European Students Union:

- independently - by the students themselves, without the involvement of the institution;
- openly - with all current students having the right to vote and be elected, regardless of their academic performance or any other discriminatory criteria;
- democratically - the representatives should be elected by all the students at the corresponding level – e.g. Students in the Academic Council to be elected by all the students at institutional level and the same rule is applied for lower organizational levels;
- with precise regulations that ensure the formality and transparency of the process – adopt a formal document (drafted by the students themselves) that provides the exact rights, responsibilities and obligations for students' representatives, the length of the mandate for each position, mentions the exact percentage students have in all decision making bodies, etc;

According to the SER, provisions for the instruction and evaluation of the management in Kutaisi University were approved in early 2018 „which describes the management and evaluation mechanisms and implementation procedures in detail”. However, the panel is not yet in position to evaluate the effectiveness of the said provisions, given its inception stage.

In terms of administration, the university currently operates the following offices: Human Resource Management and Workflow Service; Financial and Material Resources Management and Security Service; Marketing and Public Relations Office; Informational Technology Service; Quality Assurance Service; Scientific Analytical Centre; International Relations Office; Continuous Learning Centre; Library. However, the functions and responsibilities of some of these structural units are not distributed in the most logical way: for examples, the performance review of staff (academic and administrative) is divided between HR and the QA office, as well as the PR and Marketing taking over a secretarial role of the Commission for Social Issues, and is also responsible for organizing the elections of the Academic Board.

The area of qualifications awarding is also quite confusing, not only for the panel, but for the people engaged in this process interviewed during the site visit: there is a Qualifications Board the panel has met during the site visit who had difficulties explaining their own role or why they think the Faculty Board could not have decided on awarding qualifications by itself. The same „qualifications board” is an example of overlap in responsibilities (with the evaluation commissions for learning outcomes) and of the general inconsistency across the organisation chart: according to its members, „if it doesn’t work and it is an additional bureaucracy, we will bring it to an end” - which is an indicator that structural units are not being established in response to a clear need, but lacks the general coherence and upper management oversight.

The panel is also concerned that some individuals across the organization are not equipped with the necessary qualifications in order to fulfil their responsibilities effectively and in a professional manner: the head of the quality assurance office has a background in physics and no further re-training, the level of English language of staff working closely with international partners and projects is very low, etc.

The panel therefore believes that the organizational structure of KU is not fully fit for the implementation of the goals and activities described in its strategic plan and is in the same time very concerned about the units’ and individuals’ capacity to ensure effective management of the institutional activities. The panel underlines that it is not only the rules and regulations that have determined its judgments, but also the effectiveness, functionality and understanding, as concluded with the comprehensive interviews conducted during the site visit. The institution should therefore reduce the gap between its formal provisions and implementation and understanding across the academic community.

The institution does not generally use modern technologies, for its governance, administration, student support, or an electronic document processing system. There is no systematic process of having internal policies and procedures revised so that to ensure they stay current with the legislative framework and internal developments and the institution does not have a legal department.

The institution developed and adopted a strategy for effective internationalization which they are planning to achieve between 2018-2019, a document which is also referred to in the SER. However, the interviewees the panel has met clearly stated that the institution does not currently have an internationalization policy, but one is being planned. The panel is concerned about the reliability and legitimacy of the internationalization policy as long as relevant staff from corresponding units are not familiar with the document that should, technically, represent a form of job description for them.

„Strengthening internationalization to increase the quality of teaching and research” is one of the strategic objectives through which the institution plans to reach its strategic goal of „improving learning/teaching and research quality”.

According to the SER, the institution prides itself to be „among the top ten universities of Georgia and number one among private universities according to the total number of the EU funded grant projects the institution has taken part in. In total, the university participated in 8 projects on institutional development and in 3 projects on mobility, three of which are in progress”.

However, the panel can conclude that KU is not effectively utilizing internationalization results in the work of the institution, considering that:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is no outcomes-oriented strategy of selecting the institutions KU wants to sign MoUs with; according to the interviews conducted by the panel, MoUs are currently signed with project partners but, when asked about examples of aspects/processes/benefits resulting from the MoUs, the same respondent answered that such aspects „are not measured, now the MoUs don't mean much”; - the number of staff and students engaged in international mobility stays very low; - the English language proficiency of staff and students remains very low; - according to the interviews taking place during the site visit the institution did not conduct any benchmark analysis against international universities so that to improve their practices based on foreign good practice; - there are projects the institution has been or still is part of which, if taken seriously, would have triggered substantial institutional developments in areas where it is evident that no developments occurred (as it is evidenced through the present report), such as: PIQCA - "Internationalization of Quality Assurance and Competitiveness in Higher Education", INURE - "Universal Management Integrated System: European Experience on Post-Soviet Countries (BY, GE, MD, UA)“, WeNeT - Distance Learning and Retraining in Tourism, etc.
Evidences/indicators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure of HEI; • Rules and Procedures for Electing Appointing Governing Bodies; • Self-evaluation report; • Monitoring Mechanisms of Management Efficiency and Evaluation System; • Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.
Recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that students are represented in all strategic, decisional, consultative and executive bodies, as well as in all quality assurance processes, and that the elections are organized independently, openly and democratically, without limiting students right to vote and be elected, regardless of their academic performance; • Ensure the regularity of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of higher management structures; • Revisit the organization structure taking into consideration optimization of upper management and administrative units; • Increase the clarity of the functions and responsibilities of the structural units of the institution so that they implement their functions effectively and in a coordinated manner; • Ensure that positions across the organisation chart are occupied by individuals with the right qualifications that would allow them to fulfil their duties in an effective and professional manner; • Establish and follow a systematic process of having internal policies and procedures revised; • Ensure that the internationalization strategy is known at least to people whose work is expected to be derived from and guided by such document; ideally, such document should be drafted through a comprehensive consultation process; • Increase the use of modern technologies and IT support in institutional governance, administration, student support and in an electronic document processing system; • Increase the utilization of internationalization results in the work of the institution, as detailed above, including through more structured, coordinated and targeted MoUs; • Identify based on clear criteria similar international higher education institutions to benchmark institutional processes against; • Increase the English language proficiency of both staff and students.
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
2.2 Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms

- Institution effectively implements internal quality assurance mechanisms. Leadership of the institution constantly works to strengthen quality assurance function and promotes establishment of quality culture in the institution.
- HEI has a mechanism for planning student body, which will give each student an opportunity to get a high quality education.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The main responsibility for internal quality assurance across the organization lies with the Quality Assurance Office. However, the panel strongly believes that the office and its management are completely unfit for the key role an internal quality assurance unit is expected to play in a higher education institution.

First, at present the institution does not have a Quality Assurance policy to reflect all task division, responsibilities, as well as processes used for the quality assurance of all operations and to include the mechanisms and instruments used for academic and administrative staff evaluation, the surveys conducted by the institution, and, more importantly, to clarify what is the information flow and how does the collected data serve as a basis for improvement. Such information is scattered across different documents, which makes it difficult to follow the entire quality assurance work at the institution, as well as the specific design of processes, mechanisms and instruments dedicated to the purpose of quality assurance.

Second, the institution has no notion of self-evaluation in order to reflect on the quality of its operations; such processes are not conducted unless they are triggered by an upcoming authorisation/accreditation. On the only occasion when a self-evaluation process was conducted, this was externalised to a third party (according to the SER), therefore demonstrating the lack of institutional ownership over its own processes.

Third, the institution conducts surveys amongst its students, staff, alumni and employers; however, the panel believes that the instruments are generally not fit for purpose:

- the student survey on study programmes is lengthy and drafted in a language that is not accessible to the general readership; the panel is confident that the institution could evaluate and adjust the quality of its programs through different instruments (such as employers and alumni feedback, student survey for individual courses, analysis of student performance outcomes, benchmarking processes with comparable institutions nationally and abroad) without expecting students to understand the technical language or to have the ability to assess their overall evolution across the program;
- a second student survey (on learning environment and administration) that is not even clarifying its purpose from the title, is also built in a way that does not provide enough data so as to serve as a base for improvements and does not cover all the areas of major concern. For example, the question „How would you assess the work of the university administration?“ does not provide sufficient detail so as to support the institution in its quality enhancement; a „very bad“ answer from a student does not tell the university if the dissatisfaction refers to library or PR and Marketing, to opening hours or attitude of staff, to quality of books or infrastructure, etc. therefore the institution cannot use the answer in improving a service in particular. Equally, the survey does not assess students satisfaction with the available extracurricular activities, career support services, sports facilities, etc;
- the survey from employers is 8 pages long and the survey for staff work satisfaction has 41 questions, sizes which might impact on the enthusiasm of its addressees and lower the response rate;
- generally, all surveys could have a more user friendly structure and a balanced construction combining both satisfaction scales (for example 1 to 5, as opposed to giving students 2 options: satisfactory and unsatisfactory) and open ended questions;
- according to annex 18, pg. 2, par. 2, „I, II, and III course students with good academic excellence have been selected for survey“; the panel finds this practice against every sociological representativeness principle and also discriminatory against students with low or average academic results that still have the right to contribute to their educational experience at the university.

The panel can conclude that there is a generalised lack of structure, coordination and consistency in the work of the office: according to the management of the office „every department has to do some surveys for their specific topic“ - hence difficulty in the comparability of the data across the institution, part of the surveys are online, part in hard copy - hence difficulty in the aggregation of data; there is no systemic oversight and procedure for the questionnaires themselves, as sociologic instruments, to be revised. Moreover, it is not always evident how is the

feedback loop closed and how is the information used to lead improvement; the results are not made publicly available and there isn't always evidence of having feedback from the university – which might be leading, in panel's opinion, to a low level of trust of respondents in these instruments.

Fourth, many institutional processes are informal. As in every small community, people are communicating rather informally; however, if the processes are based on individual, informal and inconsistent discussions, they risk to disappear when people in certain institutional position are changing. Even if KU is a small university, its management and internal quality assurance systems have to be developed and formalised (for example by adding agenda, minutes, list of participants to meetings with alumni and external stakeholders, among others).

Fifth, the office currently has a mix of responsibilities, some of them unfit - drafting the contracts for students, drafting decrees for the rector, curriculum and syllabus - while it lacks the autonomy of creating its own quality instruments (changes in some of the surveys require discussion and approval of the Academic Council). Also, the office has taken over some rather academic tasks, such as evaluating if the assessment methods are fit for the defined learning outcomes (according to the meetings conducted during the site visit), therefore preventing other units and individuals from taking responsibility for their work and relying on the office instead. The institution has to have in mind what an internal quality assurance system means and design the tasks of the office accordingly, while assigning the other tasks to more relevant units. Therefore, the present responsibilities of the office should be revisited so that to confirm if they belong to the right structural unit, in both areas of academic and administration. According to the SER, the institutional approach for quality „creates a continuous improvement cycle and facilitates the development of a quality culture in the institution where all internal stakeholders are responsible for quality and quality at all levels”; the panel found evidence of the implementation of this approach as well as a developing quality culture. However, there still is quite a high reliance on the QA office as opposed to common ownership for and commitment to quality values.

Sixth, according to the meetings conducted during the site visit, the staff in the QA office consider that the human and material resources allocated for the office to conduct its activity are more than sufficient. The panel considers, however, that the staff in the QA Office is not fit to fulfil their role - the director has a background in physics and no relevant re-training and, more importantly, none of the staff members in the office was able to have a minimal conversation about quality management in a professional sense. Also, the panel believes that the office does not have sufficient informational resources to conduct its activity as there is no Management Information System that would support the centralisation of data collected by the QA office and make it readily available to support decision making.

Seventh, according to the SER, all staff are evaluated annually; whilst the panel still does not understand why the task division separate this evaluation between the QA office and the HR, the performance review system is unclear in both documentation and practice, which makes it difficult for staff to know what is expected from them; staff are not aware if there is any line manager performance review, the peer review is only reflected in class observations, and it is generally unclear if and how do these mechanisms impact decisions related to contracts and remuneration.

Eight, students are not engaged in the internal quality assurance processes as they only serve as a source of feedback; the institution should consider getting them more actively involved in these processes, even in the design of data collection instruments.

Ninth, the panel found evidence that evaluation results are used for further development of the activities and that the leadership of the institution makes decisions based on the results of quality assurance. However, examples in this regard only referred to student surveys and, most importantly, such results only impact on small changes related to an individual course, while generally the panel found no link between the strategic and operations management of the university and the quality system; in fact the question was addressed in several instances (mostly to upper management and administration), but often not even understood.

The institution has a mechanism for planning the student body across the institution, which takes into consideration the human and material resources allocated for the delivery of every program.

Evidences/indicators

- Structure of HEI;
- Self-evaluation report;
- The procedure of quality assessment results and report the use of report;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of quality assurance mechanisms and their efficiency assessment; • List of surveys conducted by the institution and survey templates; • Instruction to plan the number of students that can be enrolled at LLC Kutaisi University; • CVs of staff in the Quality Assurance Office; • Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.
<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and adopt a comprehensive policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of its strategic management, as detailed above; • Formalize and conduct regular self-evaluation processes and reporting to allow the institution to reflect on the quality of its own operations; • Revise the tasks and responsibilities of the Quality Assurance Office so that to relocate some of its responsibilities to more relevant units; • Ensure that the instruments used for data/feedback collection are fit for purpose, user friendly, inclusive (non-discriminatory of student level and academic performance) and cover all areas of concern for students and staff; • Develop the internal Quality Assurance system so that it is centralised, formal, clear, consistent and implemented on a continuous basis; • Ensure that the human resources allocated to the institutional quality assurance work is qualified and competent to fulfil their duties; • Acquire and implement an integrated Management Information System to aggregate all the quality make it readily available to support decision making; • Clarify, centralize and disseminate the staff performance review system; • Increase student participation in quality assurance processes; • Ensure the regularity of all surveys, consistency of the platform for conduction and ensure the transparency of results; • Standardize the revision of the quality assurance instruments and safeguard the comparability of data.
<p>Evaluation</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements </p>
<p>2.3. Observing Principles of Ethics and Integrity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HEI has developed regulations and mechanisms that follow principles of ethics and integrity. Such regulations are publicly accessible. ○ Institution has implemented mechanisms for detecting plagiarism and its prevention. ○ HEI follows the principles of academic freedom.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>According to the SER and the Strategic development plan, „honesty or sincerity of intention” is part of the KU values, which means that „good faith and high ethical standards define all the activities carried out by the university in accomplishing its educational, scientific and research missions; the university will ensure the protection of this values in the study and teaching process through the detection of plagiarism and start reaction toward it”.</p> <p>The institution has developed a Code of Ethics for the academic and administrative staff, as well as Rules of the Student Code of Ethics. These two statutory acts define the rules of conduct within the institution and in relation to all persons who directly or indirectly relate to the university activities. According to the SER, „the objective of the Code of Ethics is to regulate relationships so as to avoid all forms of discrimination and abuse, to manage conflicts, to improve organizational environment, to promote good faith and prevent unethical or illegal action”.</p>

In order to safeguard the implementation of the two regulatory documents, the organisation structure of the university includes two unit established for this purpose: the Disciplinary Commission of Employees and the Disciplinary Commission of Students.

However, the panel is concerned that the institutional values and the provisions of the regulatory documents are not sufficiently or properly promoted across the academic community - when asked about the sanctions for plagiarism, some interviewees the panel has met declared that „to tell you the truth, I don't know this.", or that „don't know, most probably they cancel your work and you start from the start".

The university is planning and has included in its Strategic Plan to purchase an anti-plagiarism software (Antiplag according to the Strategic Plan, Turnitin according to the SER). Until that becomes functional, there are no instruments in place for this purpose as the institution is relying that it will be the teachers themselves that can identify plagiarism in students' work, projects and thesis; the panel has serious concerns that individual teachers have the ability to identify theft of intellectual property considering the amount of references in the world and the accessibility of information online. Moreover, there is no provision that the academic staff is obliged or even recommended to submit student work in freely available plagiarism detection software. In fact, there was a general confusion among the interviewees the panel has met in regards to the institutional instruments currently in place in order to detect plagiarism: some considered that there is not such instrument, some considered that the institution is processing all thesis through a anti-plagiarism software acquired by another HEI in Georgia KU has a partnership with, others declared that the institution tried to establish such partnerships, but other HEIs do not accept to share resources they paid for, etc.

Students involved in research, even for the purpose of their thesis, are not following any process to confirm if their activity is conducted according to ethical rules: signed consent forms for all human subjects, ensuring confidentiality of research data, etc. The institution has not created appropriate units and bodies in charge with observing and safeguarding ethical principles in research.

According to the interviews conducted by the panel, the institution and its staff are guided and supported by principles of academic freedom.

Evidences/indicators

- Structure of HEI;
- Self-evaluation report;
- Code of Ethics for the academic and administrative staff;
- Rules of the Student Code of Ethics;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.

Recommendations:

- Better disseminate the relevant ethical regulations so that to make them more accessible to the academic community;
- Develop effective mechanisms to detect plagiarism and theft of intellectual property by seeking technological solutions and software programs instead of relying on the human factor;
- Ensure a process of approval of students' research methodology so that to safeguard research ethics before such research is being conducted.

Evaluation

- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☒ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply with requirements

3. Educational Programmes

HEI has procedures for planning, designing, approving, developing and annulling educational programmes. Programme learning outcomes are clearly defined and are in line with the National Qualifications Framework. A programme ensures achievement of its objectives and intended learning outcomes

3.1 Design and Development of Educational Programmes

HEI has a policy for planning, designing, implementing and developing educational programmes.

At present, the institution delivers 6 study programmes: 3 undergraduate (bachelor) programmes (Business Administration, Economics, Tourism Management), 2 master programmes (Finance, Banking and Insurance and Accounting and Audit) and 1 doctoral programme (Economics). All programmes were accredited between 2011-2012. In order to maintain the competitiveness of the university in the higher education market and to provide the society with high quality, market-oriented and modern education programmes, the HEI is updating and improving its programmes on a regular basis.

The procedures of planning, development, implementation and development of the programmes are outlined in the University Internal Regulations, adopted by the General Meeting on May 17, 2017. It includes clear steps of initiation, expertise, approving and revoking programmes as well as amendments in the curriculum of the current educational programmes. The document envisages participation of almost all divisions of the university: before approval/refusal, a newly initiated programme is sent for review to the Academic Council, the Faculty Dissertation Board (in case of doctoral programmes), the Financial-Material Resources Management and Security Office, the Dean, the Quality Assurance Office, Marketing and the Public Relations Office and the library. However, along with the involvement of these structural units, market research is utmost important to initiate a new program so that to investigate the extent to which the local community and labour market needs the respective programme.

Amendments to the curriculum of the current educational programmes can be initiated by the Dissertation Board of the Faculty and the academic supervisors of PhD students (in case of doctoral programmes), relevant programme committees, relevant faculties and the Quality Assurance Office; they are approved by the Academic Council based on the recommendation of the Rector.

The university implements the programmes based on the Guidelines for Performance of University Academic Higher Education Educational Programmes approved by the University Academic Council.

The interviews conducted during the visit revealed that the university staff (both academic and administrative) are well aware of the procedure for planning, designing, implementing and developing educational programmes. The academic staff, as a direct participant in the study programmes, regularly delivers its suggestions and recommendations to appropriate programme leaders and committees. Their opinions are valuable for further improvement of the programmes.

In order to attain the programmes' main goals, together with the involvement of academic staff, participation of students, employers and graduates is also very important and their feedback is especially valuable. For assessing the academic programmes, the institution uses different types of questionnaires and surveys involving the students, employers and graduates, as further detailed under standard 2.2.

The panel reviewed the surveys on evaluation and improvement of educational programmes in Kutaisi University conducted in 2017 involving students, graduates, employers and academic staff. The panel acknowledges the efforts and openness of the institution in receiving feedback from all stakeholders and discussing issues related to programme development. However, certain shortcomings have been identified:

- The total number of interviewed students is unknown and only four-year bachelor's degree students were interviewed. The high number of participants in the survey of employers' (40 employers from Imereti region) and graduates' (a total of 230) increases confidence in the results of the surveys. However, the unknown number of respondents to the student surveys and selection of only four-year bachelor's degree students make the results questionable and unreliable;
- As a result of student survey, the university claims that each programme enables students to develop general competences (general skills) which, together with field competences, are very important to ensure greater employment opportunities in a permanent environment. However, only 45% of the interviewed master's students believe that the education received at Kutaisi University fully provides with the job requirements demanded at their workplace;
- The results of employer's survey conducted by the QA office in the fall of 2017, aimed to clarify the conformity of the qualification received by the graduates within the framework of the educational programmes with the requirements of the labour market, reflect an even lower satisfaction. Only 21.62% of employers fully agreed that higher education institution's graduates who have been employed for the last 3-5 years have the skills necessary to work in the company and 59.46% partially agreed with the same

statement. These views have also been confirmed during the interviews conducted by the panel, when employers confirmed the lack of English language and practical skills of the university graduates;

- The employers the panel has met during the site visit are more involved in internships and employment of university graduates than programme development. They interact with academic staff and administration representatives but are less involved in a holistic review of the programmes;
- The university collects feedback from its graduates about the quality of the study programmes, but they are not aware if the institution takes into consideration the feedback collected from them;

Programme development should be approached in a more integrated manner, with active participation and interaction between all stakeholders. The institution should therefore better exploit the interest of its alumni and employers, as well as their willingness to contribute to programme development.

The interviews conducted with members of programmes committees, faculty and academic board during the site visit revealed that the university seeks to update the programmes based on the findings obtained from the above surveys and questionnaires to ensure their relevance with the constantly changing environment. Recently, several changes, including cancellation, have been made to the programmes. 2018-2019 is the deadline for the accreditation of three academic programmes: Business Administration (Bachelor), Finance, Banking and Insurance Counselling (Master) and Accounting and Audit (Master). Before the re-accreditation of these programmes, the programme committees renewed them in accordance to modern challenges and requirements of the labour market. The renewed Business Administrations programme will be offered to students already enrolled in the relevant educational programme, while the renewed master's programme will be launched in the 2018-2019 academic year. Due to the lack of expediency in terms of financial profitability, the doctoral educational programme in Finance was cancelled by the decision of the General Meeting of Partners in February 2018. The university protects the rights of students by ensuring that they are not affected by such amendments and grants them with an opportunity to smoothly complete the educational programmes. The only student enrolled in the cancelled doctoral programme continues to study at Akaki Tsereteli State University (ATSU) through a MoU. Under the memorandum, Kutaisi University takes the obligation to cover the difference in the tuition fee, while the ATSU takes the obligation to accept the PhD student mobility and the credits accumulated by the student in Kutaisi University.

The university claims that the Academic Council approves changes in the bachelor's and master's programs (removing some subjects, integrating some of them and enrolling new subjects in the programmes) as a result of monitoring of the programmes, as well as challenges of the labour market. However, the panel considers that the questions asked in the survey conducted for the monitoring of programs are too general and do not provide student opinions on specific disciplines. Therefore, the panel finds such claim rather unsupported in practice.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report (SER);
- Programme description;
- Market research report;
- Students, graduates, employers and academic staff surveys
- Memorandum with Akaki Tsereteli State University
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that initiation of new programs and adjustments in the existing ones are based on market research data;
- Increase the response rate in student surveys and ensure the respondents reflect the diversity of the general student body;
- Revisit surveys so that to ensure that questions are more fit for purpose and provide sufficient detail to support decision making at program level;
- Increase the interaction with alumni; promote their involvement in programme/faculty, academic and social activities and select individuals that can be formally involved in programme development;
- Integrate local employers, members of professions and stakeholders in appropriate structural units considering new and existing study programmes;

- Promote students, alumni and employers involvement in programmes development by reflecting their feedback in the programmes.

Evaluation

- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☒ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply with requirements

3.2 Structure and Content of Educational Programmes

- Programme learning outcomes are clearly stated and are in line with higher education level and qualification to be granted
- With the help of individualized education programmes, HEI takes into consideration various requirements, needs and academic readiness of students, and ensures their unhindered involvement into the educational process.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The university applies the ECTS system in the implementation of its study programmes. 1 credit in the university corresponds to 25 hours of student's academic work.

The undergraduate study programmes cover 240 credits - combination of basic specialty (120 credits including elective credits), additional specialty (there are three additional programmes applicable to the main programme (Business Administration, Economics and Tourism Management - 60 credits including elective credits) and free components (60 credits). Students can choose free components according to their interests, taking into consideration the prerequisites of the training requirements.

Taking into consideration the fact the students are not granted an academic degree in the additional specialty, and also that the structure of the programme with additional specialties prevents the recognition of the credits obtained by the undergraduate students in the first university as a free component, KU is planning to implement bachelor programs on the principle of basic specialty + free components from the 2018-2019 academic year. This change does not apply to the students who have already chosen additional programmes.

The master programmes cover 120 credits, including elective courses - 10 credits and master's thesis - 25 credits. The doctoral programme includes at least 180 credits; the total amount of educational components does not exceed 60 credits, including 10 elective credits.

Programme components are well-structured; the sequence of components in the programme and the prerequisites for accessing the component is logical. As the university does not have an electronic learning process management system, students enrolled in the university elect the module or elective courses with support and preliminary agreement with the Dean's Office. Academic staff on the programme also provide the necessary information on the chosen subject. According to the interviewees with students and Dean's Office representatives conducted by the panel, the principles of freedom of expression, transparency and competition are safeguarded during the selection of the elective subjects. However, an electronic learning process management system should be developed so as to facilitate students' choice.

The university has developed a very detailed and well-organised subject syllabus for each programme. Each syllabus contains course objectives, intended learning outcomes, teaching methods used to achieve the learning outcomes, detailed description of weekly content, corresponding literature, individual work, assessment methods for each component of assessment work, the clear criteria linking student achievement to grades and suggested literature.

The credit load of the subjects varies between 4 to 8 ECTS credits, depending on the total subject workload; the allocation of contact hours and independent study is rational, with contact hours (lectures, seminar/group work/practice/lab work) being sufficient to support students' learning and achievement of learning outcomes. According to the meetings conducted by the panel, the university has a practice to measuring the real load of several training components. For this purpose, the QA Office selects several students of average academic performance at the beginning of the semester and asks them to determine whether the time allocated by the lecturer corresponds to the time necessary for the preparation of each item required for independent work. The

results are taken into account when granting credits to the training components. However, the panel has not received any evidence of this practice.

The learning outcomes for the educational programme are based on the objectives of the programme and include basic knowledge, skills and competences provided by the programme content. They correspond to the relevant level of higher education and the qualifications awarded. The learning outcomes of the programme clearly describe what the students can do after completing the programmes.

Learning Outcomes of the programmes are stated explicitly and clearly in accordance with the six criteria of the Georgian NQF and it is possible to measure their achievement. The scope of the programmes provides proper breadth of theoretical and practical knowledge. Case study analysis, practices and project work develop students' abilities to put knowledge into practice. The teaching methods promote critical thinking and enhancement of communication skills; self-study requirements are sufficient to make students responsible to manage their learning process.

Overall, the panel can conclude that both the programmes and subjects delivered within the programmes' LOs are at the right stage in all 3 programme levels.

The panel was satisfied to see that academic and invited teachers are aware of the importance of using different teaching approaches to achieve learning outcomes of their subjects.

Based on the documents presented by the university as well as on the interviews conducted during the site visit, the panel notes that the university updates the programmes for their further improvement. However, the information posted on the website about each academic programme, teaching plan and the catalogue of programmes with brief information about programmes and relevant contact details are outdated and need renewal. Such information should be kept updated on the institutional website so that to support publicity and promotion of the programmes not only to prospective students, but also to potential partner HEIs. It is important not only for matters of external communication but also for internal use since they determine programme structure, content, teaching approaches and individual course learning outcomes.

The University declares that they ensure smooth engagement of the students with special educational needs. One chapter in the document "Guidance for Implementation of Academic Higher Education Educational Programmes in Kutaisi University" is fully devoted to the rules on how to teach students with special educational needs, including the development of individual curriculum procedures. However, the panel has no evidence of the implementation of these rules at this stage.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-assessment report;
- Educational programmes;
- Academic calendars;
- Course syllabuses;
- Methodology for the development of individual curriculum;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.

Recommendations:

- Develop and implement a clear system for measuring the load of training components through which the credits are awarded to each subject and revise the number of credits currently awarded;
- Ensure that the university website includes an updated individual programmes presentation, as well as an all-programmes catalogue in an accessible location;
- Develop and implement an electronic learning process management system not only for facilitation of students to choose subjects but also to improve teaching and learning process.

Evaluation

- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☒ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply with requirements

3.3 Assessment of Learning Outcomes

HEI has law-compliant, transparent and fair system of learning outcomes assessment, which promotes the improvement of students' academic performance.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Learning outcomes (LOs) are a combination of competencies determining what a student/graduate is expected to know, understand and be able to do by applying this knowledge on completion of the academic process or any of its stages.

The objective of assessing the level of students' learning outcomes is to qualitatively determine the relevance of students' learning results to the goals and parameters of academic higher education programs and to the one of the component of the mission of the university (to prepare highly qualified and competent specialists in business, economics, tourism and law by creating and disseminating practical and theoretical knowledge relevant to the dynamic labour market requirements).

The university has a clear policy for the assessment of students' learning outcomes. As stated in its Guidance for Academic Higher Education Educational Programs, the institution is assessing the achievement of the learning outcomes based on the following principles:

- A. transparency and publicity: information should be obtainable on all assessment components, methods or criteria; a student should know at the beginning of the academic year when and how to evaluate his/her knowledge or skills;
- B. systematic: assessment is not a single act, but a measurable process that is an element of the united motivational system of learning – a student will develop permanent readiness to identify and define the effectiveness of his/her own labour, while the teacher will develop the readiness to monitor the acquisition and development of the student's knowledge;
- C. Fairness: each student should be evaluated by the unified standard for all students' knowledge assessment; each student should be given an equal opportunity to achieve high academic scores.

The university states in the SER that it is assessing the level of achievement of student learning results according to each component of the programme. The level of learning outcomes of any component of the programme is evaluated for each student individually through midterm and final assessment forms. Each form of evaluation includes one or several components of the evaluation that determine the methods of assessing the student's knowledge, skills and competences, e.g., written test, essay, presentation, practical and theoretical tasks, group work, participation in discussion, case solution, participation in the simulative process, oral or written examination, etc.

During the interviews conducted by the panel with academic staff and students, it became evident that these criteria are transparent and known by students and are presented and explained to them at the first teaching week of each course. Students also receive the information on the assessment system and forms from the syllabus of all the courses via corporate e-mails at the beginning of the semester.

The panel is content to see that this policy is fully materialised. General evaluation criteria, which are described in the program description document, are tailored to each course and explained in exhaustive detail in the relevant syllabus. For each assessment element, the criteria corresponding to different levels of achievement are listed clearly. Assessments of intermediate appraisal components of the programmes' training courses, except intermediate exam assessment, are reflected in the special register journals. The dean's office is responsible for organising mid-term and final examinations and the relevant subject teachers conduct them. Lecturers in charge of the study courses evaluate intermediate and final written exam papers within the next 3 days of the exam. Mid-term and final examination results as well as results of the learning outcomes from the other components of the study courses are recorded in the students' official evaluation statements, not directly accessible to students. Evaluation statements are specially produced according to the Instruction of "Drawing the Documents Envisaged by Academic Higher Education Educational Programmes". The Dean's office transfers information from the statements to the students' cards.

The teaching staff provides feedback to students after each assignment. According to the meetings with students conducted by the panel, teaching staff is easily accessible to discuss any questions students might have about their

grades and provide clarifications. Students are most of the time satisfied with the feedback they receive from their teachers.

However, in case a student's complaint is not resolved by the teacher of the course, they can follow a formal procedure as defined in Guidance for Academic Higher Education Educational Programs: "The student has the right to object to the evaluation of their intermediate and/or final examination performance by applying to the dean of the faculty within three working days from the date of his/her assessment. The written statement should be precisely specified, what exactly and why is protested. Without this, the performance of the examination will not be re-evaluated." The dean issues an order on the appointment of the chairperson and members of the re-assessment commission, not later than the next working day after the application is submitted. Students are fully aware of their rights to submit an academic appeal, although no instances of exercising such rights was reported during the site visit.

Finally, students are also aware and enjoy the privileges granted by being placed at the top of students' ranking list. The university, based on the level of assessment of the results of the learning outcomes, has developed a clear system of calculation of the cumulative weighted scores of student learning outcomes achievement level (GPA). According to the GPA scores, the university establishes a students' ranking list, according to which they can benefit from the privileges established by the University Internal Regulation Document. It also gives the students the right to select the objects/organisations of professional and educational practices, to select the undergraduate and postgraduate papers' thesis, to be granted with different category of diploma and to extend study in foreign higher education institutions.

Evidences/indicators

- Guidance to Academic Higher Education Educational Programmes;
- University higher educational programmes;
- Programs syllabuses;
- Students, graduates and employers surveys;
- Analysis of students, graduates and employers survey results;
- Results of monitoring of students' academic performance;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.

Evaluation

- ☒ Complies with requirements
- ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply with requirements

4. Staff of the HEI

HEI ensures that the staff employed in the institution (academic, scientific, invited, administrative, support) are highly qualified, so that they are able to effectively manage educational, scientific and administrative processes and achieve the goals defined by the strategic plan of the institution. On its hand, the institution constantly provides its staff with professional development opportunities and improved work conditions.

4.1. Staff Management

- HEI has staff management policy and procedures that ensure the implementation of educational process and other activities defined in its strategic plan.
- HEI ensures the employment of qualified academic/scientific/invited/administrative/ support staff.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The institution has a comprehensive manual on human resource management that includes methodological principles and rules for staff management. According to the SER, the policy document was developed within the

framework of European Union Tempus project. The manual covers the main areas of staff management: needs assessment, recruitment, selection, assessment, motivation, professional development.

The fourth strategic goal in the KU strategic plan is the development of human resources. The strategic objectives designed to support the institution in reaching this goal are the improvement of HR management mechanisms and the improvement of the quantitative and qualitative indicators of personnel. The budget allocated to the implementation of planned activities for 2018-2020 is 17000 GEL. According to the interviews conducted by the panel, the General Meeting of Partners decided to financially support this initiative considering the difficulties faced in attracting qualified academic personnel. The budget allocation does not seem as ambitious as the strategic objectives the institution has listed in the strategic plan.

Kutaisi University has 105 employees, out of them 26 serve on academic positions. The number of affiliated academic staff is 16. The university has 49 invited lecturers. The number of administrative and support staff amounts 46. Considering the fact that currently the number of active students is 299, presented figures of academic, invited and administrative staff and their ratios to students seem satisfactory. However, in case the university increases marginal number of students, more academic personnel is needed. It is worth to note that the strategic plan entails activities targeted to increase number of professors, including affiliated professors.

As it resulted during the site visit, after the official submission of the SER to NCEQE, the university management decided to make some improvements in the organizational structure of the institution, reorganization that was still on the way during the authorisation visit. According to the interviews conducted by the panel, the university is planning to contract an audit company to look into the effectiveness of the organisation chart, as well as to recruit staff for the newly established structural units. The area of the organisation structure is further detailed under standard 2.1.

An open competition is mandatory before the selection of academic personnel, but not necessarily for other staff members. Some positions are vacant at the moment, such as the University Director, the Head of the Scientific Analytical Centre, the Head of the IT Office.

The function distribution between the personnel seems generally blurred, while the basic tasks assigned to some positions are either overlapping or illogical, as mentioned briefly under standard 2.1. For example, the duty of the member of the program committee, faculty board and academic council is the same - decision making on possible amendments to the educational programmes. The Head of Marketing and PR office is responsible for the organization of elections of the Academic Council members, as well as for issues related to socially vulnerable students. The QA office is responsible for the preparation of students' contracts, even if the faculty has managers that could take over such technical tasks. The legal revision and approval of all internal regulations and the relevant documents is in the responsibility of the Head of Human Resource Management Office, mainly because of his legal background.

In order to increase staff effectiveness, the university management decided to draw a bold line between academic and administrative positions: the personnel are restricted from occupying simultaneously academic and administrative positions.

The university has transparent procedures for hiring academic and invited, as well as administrative staff. Human Resource Management Manual includes the procedure that ensures socialization and adaptation of newly appointed employee. According to the interviews conducted by the panel, the administrative staff were hired based on open competition. Later on, in some cases, the university has reviewed their working skills and proposed different positions. The staff seemed satisfied with those decisions.

As resulted during the site visit, the university management intends to financially support staff professional development and send them for internships abroad. However, at the time of the site visit this area was considered to be challenging; moreover, according to the Director of the Human Resource Department, the institution „does not have professional development coherent plans or strategy“. The panel has learned about some development sessions provided to staff, but these are not always offered on relevant topics and are not organised coherently with a clear vision on what needs they are supposed to be addressing. Moreover, there is no clear process of identifying the professional development needs of staff, the institution does not evaluate the impact of its scattered professional development sessions and, lastly, the resources allocated to this areas are insufficient.

The university adopted an affiliation rule in November of 2017 that changed the overall policy towards academic staff. Since the affiliation rule went to force, the university signed affiliation agreements with 12 academic

personnel and afterwards announced a public competition that resulted in 4 additional affiliated academic staff. This also triggered the salary policy and incentivized setting specific workload requirements. The institution has the „Professor Emeritus” recognition, which is also supported by a permanent salary payment.

The methods and rules for the performance evaluation of administrative staff are regulated in the manual on Human Resource Management. The manual specifies that such evaluations are to be conducted annually and describes the optional methods of evaluation; the choice of the method selected depends on the goals of a specific assessment process and the resources available to the institution (time, human resources, finances) during the evaluation process. The evaluation of academic and visiting staff is regulated by the instruction “Assessment of the Academic Staff, Teachers and Visiting Professors of the University”, which is approved by the Rector. The evaluation scheme for all categories of personnel is recently elaborated and part of the processes described by the manual are not yet in practice. The manual also includes employee motivation forms including remuneration and payment procedures; but at this stage it is not yet clear how the incremental system will work.

Based on the interviews conducted by the panel, the performance evaluation of staff is not consistent, centralised and transparent; the panel is unclear about the regularity of some evaluation methods, the tasks are divided between two different structural units - HR and the QA Office - and staff do not always know what is expected from them or who evaluates them.

According to the meetings during the site visit, academic staff is being evaluated through students surveys, peer lesson observations and self-evaluation; however, the academic staff was unable to give relevant examples of improvements they have made based on the survey data. Results are not always discussed with staff, unless there is a substantial problem identified. The panel believes that evaluation results should always be addressed with staff; quality is never an end in itself, there is always room for improvement staff should be indicated so that to encourage commitment to continuous quality enhancement.

When the panel asked administrative staff about the evaluation of their performance, the response was that „there are some discussion on our performance; the QA office gives the data”. Staff are therefore unaware of who and how evaluates them. The panel has seen a student survey which also refers to administration; however, the nature of the questions makes it impossible for the institution to identify the areas to be improved throughout its administration services. This has been further detailed under standard 2.2. Moreover, there is not instrument to evaluate staff by their line manager/immediate superior they should be accountable to for fulfilling their job description duties.

The institution has defined qualification requirements for academic and administrative staff. Affiliated and other academic personnel have demonstrated the competence to undertake academic and research activities defined by the strategic plan and also expressed their loyalty to the university. As for the qualification requirements for the administrative staff, they are more fitted to personalities occupying those positions rather than considering the job descriptions. Qualifications that are crucial for effective performance of the relevant staff are set as desirable requirements, but not as necessary. Language proficiency requirement is not clearly defined. For example, Head of International Relations Office is required to have a foreign language proficiency, but is not clear which level of the language proficiency is sufficient to fulfil the assigned tasks.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-evaluation report;
- Human Resource Management Manual;
- Affiliation Rule;
- Personal files of staff;
- Contracts;
- Job descriptions and qualification requirements;
- Staff satisfaction survey results;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.

Recommendations:

- Increase the funding allocated to the HR strategic objective in order to achieve the targets the institution has set for itself;
- Develop qualification requirements of staff according to their job descriptions;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that functions distribution among staff falls within the authority of the relevant structural units and is not influenced by the background and experience of certain individuals; • Increase the staff development prioritisation by developing a clear process of identifying the professional development needs of staff, invest more resources into staff development and assess the impact of professional development sessions; • Ensure that staff performance evaluation is implemented in a coherent, centralised and transparent manner and that it serves as a basis for continuous improvement in the activity of both academic and administrative staff; • Implement the performance based remuneration system.
Best Practices (if applicable): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of dividing lines between academic and administrative positions and functions; • Recognizing distinguished professor by giving the title of professor emeritus and salary commitment.
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
4.2. Academic/Scientific and Invited Staff Workload
<p>Number and workload of academic/scientific and invited staff is adequate to HEI's educational programmes and scientific-research activities, and also other functions assigned to them</p>
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>The institution has adopted an academic workload scheme for academic and invited personnel that is a part of the "Guidance for Implementation of Academic Programs". According to these provisions, the academic workload of teaching staff during the academic year should not exceed 1000 hours. Academic workload implies lectures/practices of the course during the academic year and pre-exam consultations, as well as contact hours with students and workload at other HEIs: for academic staff - not less than 50 hours and not more than 340 hours at Kutaisi University; and not more than 510 hours (in total) at Kutaisi University and other HEIs. In case the employee is academic or invited personnel at other HEI at the same time, the volume of the work should not exceed 12 hours/week at Kutaisi University. For teachers and invited professors – not less than 30 hours and not more than 510 hours at Kutaisi University. In case the employee is a member of an academic, teacher or invited teacher/professor personnel at other HEI at the same time - not more than 510 hours in total and the volume of the work should not exceed 17 hours a week at Kutaisi University.</p> <p>According to the information received from the Registry, 34 academic and invited personnel at the same time serve at other HEIs. In 14 cases, the weekly workload of the personnel exceeds 40 hours and basically is more than 50 hours. The workload of 10 affiliated personnel per week is 15 hours and more, which contradicts the internal regulation, as mentioned above. Also, the workload of one invited lecturer is 34 hours at Kutaisi University (68 hours in total) while the maximum workload of invited personnel should not exceed 17 hours per week.</p> <p>Workload scheme includes the supervision of thesis at all study levels, preparation of syllabus, preparation and publications of scientific articles in foreign peer-reviewed journals and such activities are detailed as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation as a speaker in scientific conferences organized by the university - 50 hours on each such event; • Membership in the University Academic Board or Faculty Dissertation Board - 50 hours; • Membership in the Faculty Board - 20 hours. <p>According to the regulation, the professors who are affiliated to the university, and those who are not affiliated to any other HEI, should perform one or several assignments during the academic year.</p> <p>An application for the academic workload for the next academic year is submitted to the Faculty Dean by the relevant personnel in the last month of the academic year. The application has to consider the new intake of students per educational program. The academic or invited personnel fill out the application and submits to the department. The head of the department makes arrangements to the application according to the university/faculty priorities. The draft workload plan is discussed at the department meeting. The agreed plan is</p>

submitted to the Faculty Dean, who approves it. The Study Process Monitor is responsible to control the consultations conducted with students. All data about the workload hours is provided to the department. The remuneration of academic and invited personnel is directly aligned to their individual workload plan and its fulfilment. Overtimes are taken into consideration.

The academic and invited personnel were informed about the workload regulations and their obligations according to the individual workload plans.

The academic staff defines their primary affiliation to the institution based on the affiliation agreement. Affiliation terms and conditions are defined in a formal agreement between academic staff and Kutaisi University.

The institution has defined the target benchmarks for its academic and invited personnel and estimated date of reaching each benchmark. The ratio of the academic and scientific staff to the total number of the staff is $\frac{1}{3}$ and the target benchmark for the end of 2018 is $\frac{1}{3}$. Ratio of the academic, scientific, invited staff number to the number of the educational programmes is 11.8/1 and the target benchmark is 11/1. Ratio of the affiliated staff number to the number of students is 1/18 since the university signed affiliation agreements with four more professors (according to SER it was 1/25 and benchmark was 1/38 (the panel needs to confirm if this is a technical mistake because instead of 38 should be 18)).

Student body planning methodology sets qualitative and quantitative parameters of human resources. The qualitative parameters of human resources include qualification and experience of people implementing the program components and also functions they should perform according to the relevant position (affiliated professor/associate professor/visiting professor). For example, academic degree of scientific supervisor for PhD or MA thesis. The quantitative parameters, like the number of academic or visiting professors, are not dependent on the size of the student body. For example, no less than one affiliated professor, associate professor or assistant is target benchmark for each department of the faculty.

The methodological and conceptual issues related to staff seem elaborated through the scrutiny, however there is a lack of evidences if that approaches or the scheme work effectively.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-evaluation report;
- Workload of Academic/ Teacher/ Invited Personnel;
- Student Body Planning Methodology;
- Information on academic workload from the Registry;
- Meetings conducted during the site visit.

Recommendations:

Elaborate effective mechanisms in order to regulate and manage staff workload and monitor how the workload scheme affects the productivity of the relevant staff.

Evaluation

- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☒ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply with requirements

5. Students and Their Support Services

HEI ensures the development of student-centred environment, offers appropriate services, including career support mechanisms; it also ensures maximum awareness of students, implements diverse activities and promotes student involvement in these activities. HEI utilizes student survey results to improve student support services

5.1. The Rule for Obtaining and Changing Student Status, the Recognition of Education, and Student Rights

- For each of the educational levels, HEI has developed regulations for assignment, suspension and termination of student status, mobility, qualification granting, issuing educational documents as well as recognition of education received during the learning period.
- HEI ensures the protection of student rights and lawful interests.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The institution has adopted regulations for the assignment, termination, suspension and mobility of students which are written in a proper and clear way, as well as information for granting scholarships and financial support. These documents are made publicly available on the university website and generally known to students, as it was confirmed during the meetings conducted by the panel.

The written appeals system provides regulations relating to examination grades only. According to the meetings conducted by the panel, both students and teachers are aware of these written procedures. If a student disagrees with their examination grade, they have three days to write a letter to the dean's office indicating the reasons of their appeal. However, the appeal system does not cover the grades on other continuous assessments such quizzes or presentation. It was the perspective of the academic staff the panel has seen during the visit that students can the teachers directly and negotiate on their grading.

Students are members of the Faculty Board, as an instance where they can contribute to promoting their rights and lawful interest. According to the members of the Faculty Board student representatives are always welcome to raise any issue related to educational as well as extracurricular activities. However, as resulted from the meetings conducted by the panel, students are not involved in matters related to program development (other than filling out a survey they barely understand) or appeals system. The panel has asked the student representatives to give examples of the last initiatives or points they raised on the Faculty Board; the answer indicated that student representation at KU is only focusing on extracurricular activities. Also, there is a substantial problem of engagement and communication between students and their elected representatives: there is hardly any communication in order for the elected representatives to regularly gather information from students about their complaints and drawbacks in the learning process in order to create a better educational environment, nor is there any dissemination and reporting to students about the updates and developments on the Faculty Board that might be impacting students.

The institution provided the sample of agreement between students and university. According to the agreement, any changed regulation/normative document which changes the student's agreement conditions is sent through general email. The institution should consider, however, actually discussing any modifications with students and their elected representatives before any amendments are made and generally disseminated. The university should note that the European Ministers responsible for Higher Education described (in their Prague Communiqué, 2001) students as "competent, active and constructive partners" in the establishment and shaping of EHEA. They should therefore be recognised as such and involved in any decision making, especially since it is impacting on their student life.

The institution has a high number of suspended and low attendance of students. However, the panel did not find evidence to indicate a systematic approach of institutional investigations into the root of these two problems so that to support the solution finding process. The panel is concerned that the institution does not implement its Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle on all institutional activities, especially on the ones that are severely impacting on the quality of the educational process.

According to the meetings conducted by the panel, students are generally aware of the provisions relating to their rights and interests such as ethics code, their rights and obligations, appeals procedure, as well as terms of agreement with the institution. However, the sanctions in case ethical breaches should be better communicated and explained to students as they are not aware of, for example, the consequences in case of plagiarism.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-evaluation report;
- Instructions for Enrolment Students at LLC Kutaisi University;
- Mechanism of protecting students' rights and lawful interests;
- Code of Ethics;
- Sample Agreements between Student and LLC Kutaisi University;
- Guideline for Implementation of Academic Higher Education Educational Programs at LLC Kutaisi University;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.

Recommendations:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase student engagement in the quality enhancement at program level, as well as in terms of teaching methodology, appeals procedures, etc; • Improve student representation by achieving their role in institutional bodies – representing student rights and interests – as opposed to only ensuring support for extracurricular activities; ensure an effective bi-directional communication between students and their elected representatives; • Address the issue of the very high number of students with suspended status/low attendance in a structured and systematic way, taking into consideration all the threats that this situation might be related to; • Ensure that the provisions in the Code of Ethics, including the sanctions in case of breaches are better disseminated to students; • Discussing with students and their elected representatives any modification to their agreement with the institution before any amendments are made.
Suggestions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the academic appeals system includes grades to any formative and continuous assessment methods, not only to the final examination.
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
5.2 Student Support Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HEI has student consulting services in order to plan educational process and improve academic performance ○ HEI has career support service, which provides students with appropriate counselling and support regarding employment and career development ○ HEI ensures students awareness and involvement in various university-level, local and international projects and events, and supports student initiatives ○ HEI has mechanisms, including financial mechanisms to support low SES students
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements <p>According to the meetings conducted by the panel, students receive consultation and support on the planning of education process and improvement of academic performance through their teachers which are always accessible and show a readiness to communicate.</p> <p>The institution provides students' career support advice through its PR and Marketing department, which provides regular trainings related to the labour market, such as applied sessions related to CV writing, interviews, etc. The university has good career development activities, such as financing students to attend job fairs in different regions in order to build contacts with future employers, signing memorandums with different employers such as the JSC "Bank of Georgia".</p> <p>The university has strong connections with employers. According to the meetings conducted by the panel, information about employers is publicly available and students gradually receive news on available vacancies through their email. While employers and stakeholders are engaged with the university in terms of internships employment opportunities and feedback being sought from them through a survey, the panel has learnt during the site visit that the external partners are not engaged in program development in a more holistic way, as previously detailed under standard 3.1.; the panel is therefore unsure to what extent does the institution integrate the employers of their graduates in the process of designing and revising study programmes in order to ensure that they continue to respond to the needs of the labour market and to be fit for employment requirements.</p> <p>The institution regularly conducts surveys amongst its students and alumni regarding their personal, professional and academic development. However, the surveys themselves are not structured well enough to provide sufficient detail that would serve as a basis for improvement, and they leave out some areas of major concern for students, such as how would students like to reschedule the lecture hours in order to solve low attendance problem, how satisfied students are with facilities and technology, what kind of additional e-service/facility would students like to have; further details are provided under standard 2.2. Also, there isn't always evidence of having feedback from the university, which has the potential to decrease the trust in the instrument if results are not published and</p>

feedback is not always visible. Moreover, in terms of student administration, the panel is concerned about the capacity of the internal quality assurance system to detect and signal irregularities to higher management so that to better seek solutions and tackle issues such as low attendance or high suspended status. The quality assurance instruments relating to students and their support services are further detailed under standard 2.2.

The institution supports student involvement in international conferences and exchange programs as well as extracurricular and other student initiatives, which students are generally satisfied with. During the last four years 8 students participated in international exchange programs and currently 2 master students are studying in Technical University of Lisbon for one semester. Also, in June 2018, two masters and seven bachelor students will be sent on a one-week business training in Masaryk University in Czech Republic and University of Minho in Portugal.

The institution developed an Internationalization Strategy for the 2018-2019 timeframe, as further detailed under standard 2.1. The information about exchange programs and foreign university partners is available on the university website. Even though the university has implemented several exchange programs for Georgian students, during the meetings taking place on the site visit the panel has learnt that students would like to have an even higher level of English language classes so that to better develop their communicational and analytical skills in this language.

The institution supports students' self-government to organize sport competitions and theatre performance, as well as educational competitions, such as intellectual game called "What? Where? When?" as learnt during the site-visit.

The Institution has different forms of financial support in place, but there are no specific written criteria and step-by-step procedures to describe how the university evaluates students to be granted different kind of scholarships and financial support, and what criteria do students have to meet in order to keep their scholarships. There is no system that regulates granting financial support for academic grounds separated from social grounds. The panel would like to remind the institution that there are two categories of scholarships/financial aid which have different purposes: first type – academic scholarships – have the objective to support and encourage excellence and performance and therefore should be offered taking into account academic results. The second type – social financial aid – has the role to facilitate the access, progress and completion of higher education studies of students that are facing socio-economical difficulties, and should therefore offered to students that need them from the socio-economical point of view, without taking into account the academic performance. Consequently, the financial support offered by the institution should be revised so as to ensure that these two principles are adhered to.

Socially disadvantaged students who need support during the studying process can address dean's office. The university has special flexible payment method for the low SES student, and the student's need is evaluated only by examining the financial condition of student's family. However, except of this flexible payment method, the university does not have other options to support students in order to help them through education, such as giving full tuition waiver according to their family social situation.

There is no psychologist readily available to support potential individual issues with the capacity to impact on student academic performance; when addressed during the site visit, the institution representatives responded that „all of us are unofficial psychologist, we are close to students and they can discuss us”. However, none of the staff in the area of student administration has a background in psychology.

The university is only partially adapted to students with special needs. It does have an elevator and ramp for people with walking disabilities. However, the environment and learning resources are not adapted for people with hearing and visual impairments.

The panel is very concerned about the institutional capacity to organise its structural units dedicated to student administration, as previously approached under standard 2.1. The task distribution in this area is not structured in the most coherent manner: PR and Marketing department has taken over the career support services, but it also has many other unfit secretarial, administrative and electoral duties, such as controlling material upload for students on Google Drive, organising elections, etc. There is no student administration office/department and all student related affairs such as signing contracts, enrolment, electives, tuition fees, complaint about the appeal of exams, seem to be handled by the 2 secretaries in the dean's office. The panel is concerned not only that this structure is not fit for purpose so as to serve the current needs, but it is also impacting on institutional capacity to

detect and identify solutions for challenges in its students' body, such as identifying students in risk of dropping out their studies, intervening and investigating individual students with low attendance, etc.

Last, but not least, the institution uses very little technology support in the area of student management and administration, with no platform or IT support. The university does not have an electronic system for centralising grades and uploading learning materials. There is paper based system instead and materials are uploaded on Google drive; however, the panel has noticed during the site visit that only several class materials were uploaded. Classes are not well-equipped to conduct the effective lectures, as there are no projectors in every class. The university does not provide each class with air conditioning which may make the teaching and learning process less productive for both staff and students.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-evaluation report;
- General Survey of Students and Personal of LLC Kutaisi University;
- Policy of Internationalization of LLC Kutaisi University;
- Career Support Service at LLC Kutaisi University;
- Support for Socially Disadvantaged students and results at LLC Kutaisi University;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.

Recommendations:

- Further increase the internationalisation at the institution by supplementing the number of exchanges students are part of and the number of English language courses;
- Increase the transparency of the financial support for students by developing clear descriptions of procedures and processes in place for this purposes;
- Develop more fit-for-purpose criteria for providing financial support to student, based on their academic performance and social status respectively;
- Ensure better adapted environment and learning resources for students with special needs;
- Reorganise the structural units dedicated to student administration and support services so that they are fit for purpose and meet the needs in this area;
- Provide the academic community with all the necessary physical facilities and learning resources adapted to modern standards so as to facilitate the teaching and learning process, as detailed above;
- Increase the measures in place to support low SES students.

Evaluation

- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☒ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply with requirements

6. Research, development and/or other creative work

Higher Education Institution, considering its type and specifics of field(s), works on the strengthening of its research function, ensures proper conditions to support research activities and improve the quality of research activities

6.1 Research Activities

- HEI, based on its type and specifics of its fields, carries out research/creative activities.
- Ensuring the effectiveness of doctoral research supervision
- HEI has public, transparent and fair procedures for the assessment and defense of dissertations which are relevant to the specifics of the field

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

According to the Charter of Kutaisi University, one of the main directions of the institutional activities is to conduct scientific and applied research, as also confirmed through the mission statement of the university: "to satisfy the educational and consulting needs of the community, to implement applied and fundamental research of regional,

national and international importance". However, when asked about the strategy and principles of determining the said „importance", the management of the institution could not clarify the process of priority setting beyond the local reach where, presumably, the institution knows „what problems there are in the region".

Based on the submitted documents and the interviews conducted by the panel, it is clear that the scientific research activities of the university are mainly conducted in the following forms:

1. Scientific and research work performed, either independently or in cooperation with other organisations and institutions, by PhD students under the guidance of academic staff at the Faculty of Social Sciences;
2. Scientific and research work performed by academic staff and students within the scope of scientific-research activities financed by university scientific grants;
3. Scientific and research work performed by academic personnel (mostly theoretical research) within the scope of the job responsibilities of university academic staff;
4. Participation of the academic staff and students in scientific (scientific-practical) conferences and publication of scientific and research articles in scientific journals.

To coordinate, support and successfully carry out scientific activity, the Scientific-Analytical Centre was established at the university in 2010. The centre is actively working on raising funds from different governmental and donor organisations to implement scientific-research projects. In order to ensure an efficient, transparent and fair distribution of funds/grants on internal scientific research projects, the university has developed an internal grant system administered in accordance with the procedures outlined by the Internal Regulation Document. It determines the general rule of submission, reviewing, approval and monitoring of internal grant projects. Nine theoretical and applied projects have been financed since 2011 amounting to 93,030 GEL.

Despite the fact that the university states that its mission is to carry out applied and fundamental research of the regional, national and international importance, unfortunately, the areas of research are mostly limited to and focused on finding ways for the development of the region of Imereti and the subject of scientific research is limited to theoretical and practical problems of the region's economic and social development. The institution should expand therefore the scope of its research and participate in national and international studies.

The findings and results achieved within the framework of the projects are valuable information for local governments in developing strategic development goals and objectives of the region.

Scientific-research activities at the university are integrated with teaching and learning process. An interesting example in this case is training course "Introduction in the Economics and Business" prepared and published within the framework of the grant "Prepare Training Course for New Learning Discipline" for Business Administration/Economics Bachelor's Degree students. Publications were presented to the experts during the site-visit.

Except for local funds and grants, the university has been involved as a partner in the implementation of 8 applied research projects funded by the EU during the last 10 years.

Since 2010, Kutaisi University has organised annual international scientific practical conferences and the papers presented are published. Proceedings of the conferences were presented to the experts during the site-visit.

The university periodically finances the publication of monographs and textbooks prepared by its professors. A total of 4 text books were published between 2012-2014, out of which "How to Write a Doctoral Thesis" by N. Chilhladze deserves a special mention. The work is especially valuable for doctoral programme students. In order to support scientific research activities, memorandums are signed with different economic and governmental agencies.

The university has been publishing the scientific practical journal "Economic Profile" which has an international circulation and where recognised Georgian and foreign scientists are members of the editorial board. The journal is peer reviewed and the abstracts are published in the Institute of Scientific Information of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, Russia.

The scientific research component is of utmost importance for implementing the master's and doctoral programmes; the master' thesis is granted 25 credits, and the scientific research component in the doctoral program is allocated 120 credits. The institution started offering doctoral education in 2009. Initially, several PhD programmes were running, but currently there is only one PhD programme in economics, with seven dissertations having been defended until now. At present the university has 9 students enrolled in the doctoral programme in

economics, 5 of whom are first year students and are doing only learning components as envisaged by the programme. The other 4 students are already conducting research on their individual specific topics.

The university argues that the main motivation for launching the doctoral programmes was to prepare highly qualified academic staff for the university and the whole region. From the very beginning, a high standard of research was set for successfully defending a dissertation, which is proved by the high requirements for admission into the programmes (including a B2 level in foreign language proficiency) and inviting qualified professors recognised throughout the country to be scientific supervisors of theses. While assessing the admission criteria for enrolment at the programme, the university recognises certificates issued by different language centres. In case of non-existence of such certificates, the applicants are required to pass a language test conducted by the university. However, during the interviews conducted by the panel, both the PhD students, as well as their supervisors failed to confirm a B2 level of English proficiency.

The university has not had the experience of inviting foreign professors as co-supervisors of dissertations. However, in order to improve the quality of dissertations, the university plans to introduce this element of internationalisation in future.

The university ensures the effectiveness of doctoral research supervision by clearly defined functions of the doctorate/research supervisor, which are determined in the Guidelines for Implementation of Academic Higher Education Educational Programmes. According to the guidelines, a doctoral student accomplishes the dissertation with the help and observation of a supervisor. A supervisor may be a university professor, invited professor or, in exceptional cases, associate professor – with a single right granted by the Academic Council. The supervisor must have a doctoral degree or its equivalent degree, experience of scientific research in the field of doctorate dissertation and publications in the relevant field. The supervisor is appointed according to the doctoral student's research direction, based on the agreement between the student and the supervisor.

The supervisor helps the PhD student to select the research topic so that freedom of choice of the student is fully protected. One professor cannot be a supervisor to more than five students at the same time. The university declares that it ensures efficient and high quality supervision of the doctoral theses by appointing highly qualified scholars as supervisors. However, the lack of English language skills by academic personnel is a significant barrier to efficient thesis supervision as it reduces the possibility of using modern foreign language scientific and information sources in research. PhD supervisors are experienced and qualified scholars. They are actively engaged in studies, participate in conferences and publish articles in various scientific journals, but rarely in high status foreign language international publications.

The PhD supervisor is responsible for the completion of a thesis in accordance with the individual work plan of dissertation. The supervisor provides students with regular consultations and recommendations, assists them to find relevant modern literature and to conduct scientific research in a professional manner. The supervisor helps students in corrections and gradually checks the preparation of dissertation work.

The study course "The Basis of Scientific Writing" supports first course PhD students to design and write their thesis according to the expected requirements. The syllabus of the subject, along with other topics, includes teaching about the issue of plagiarism. The PhD programme in economics does not envisage teaching of "Research Methodology" as a separate subject, but the programme managers pointed out during the interview and students also confirmed that the programme includes "Econometrics" which helps them with research methodology as well. However the experts opinion is that PhD students should more thoroughly learn how to conduct researches and integration of the "Research Methodology" as a subject in the doctoral program curriculum is highly recommended. The university does not have a special anti-plagiarism software to test PhD and master's thesis for plagiarism. During the interviews conducted by the panel it resulted that the supervisors are quite qualified and aware of the work and achievements in the relevant field of research, which allows them to detect plagiarism. However, the panel has serious concerns about the ability of individual teachers to identify theft of intellectual property. The matter is further detailed under standard 2.3.

Students' survey results on Efficiency of Supervision of Doctoral Studies conducted by the QA Office in December 2017 revealed that 94% of respondents evaluate supervision of doctoral research as efficient. The same information was confirmed by students during the interview. However, the panel is not clear as to what do students consider under as „efficient supervision“ since none of the supervisors has attended trainings that would have them prepared for the task.

To provide a high standard of dissertation thesis, Chapters XVII to XIX of the “Guidance for Implementation of Academic Higher Education Educational Programs in LLC Kutaisi University” define gradual and consistent processes that build a systematisation of the research process, presentation of intermediate research reports and the supervisor’s regular feedback to the student. The doctoral student is required to present two colloquiums at the scientific forums organised by the faculty board reflected in the preparation and presentation of relevant materials around the dissertation thesis or its chapters. The main goal of the colloquiums is to systematise the student’s knowledge, develop the necessary skills for creative thinking, present their work to the public and communicate with the scientific community.

The discussions at the colloquiums are reported in the protocol of the meeting of the faculty dissertation board. The same protocol presents the opinion of the dissertation board members about the colloquium and the doctoral student’s presentation. Moreover, the doctoral student is required to publish at least three scientific articles connected with the PhD thesis topic. The publication of the scientific articles will be part of the work on the dissertation if it is published in a refereed/reviewed journal, impact-factor peer-reviewed journal, relevant international scientific journal, proceeding of an international conference or an electronic or printed refereed/reviewed journal published in Georgia.

Before defending the thesis, the PhD supervisor prepares a conclusion of the completed thesis which describes the quality of work, the abstract of the thesis and the thesis itself.

In case of supervisor’s positive recommendation, the thesis is sent to two independent experts for evaluation, who prepare a review each. The review must include the overview of the thesis, its strengths and weaknesses, relevant remarks and recommendations and the reviewers’ opinions about awarding the doctoral degree to the student.

Only in case of positive reviews from reviewers, the date and the time for defending the dissertation is scheduled.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-evaluation report;
- Guidance for Implementation of Academic Higher Education Educational Programs in LLC Kutaisi University;
- Information about the scientific/creative/performing activity of the academic and scientific personnel of HEI;
- Memorandums of agreement with economic agents and the planned, current and implemented research projects as a result of cooperation with them;
- Development strategy of the University as fundamental and/or applied research/creative/performing activity;
- Report on student survey on efficiency of the research supervision;
- The list of defended PhD thesis during the last 5 years and defended Master’s papers during the last 2 years;
- The list of abstracts of defended Doctoral dissertations during the last 2 years and for learning university the abstracts of defended Master’s papers during the last 2 years;
- Regulation of evaluation and defence of the Doctoral dissertations;
- Public, transparent and fair procedures for funding research;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.

Recommendations:

- Ensure a more coherent strategy of determining research priorities and focus;
- Expand the research area and focus from regional development trends to national and global level studies;
- Examine the knowledge of foreign language of PhD of candidates' more accurately during admission;
- Include more foreign language components into the doctoral program;
- Integrate a research methodology subject in the doctoral program curriculum;
- Ensure appointment of qualified professors with foreign language skills as supervisors of the doctoral programmes; Invite qualified foreign professors as a co-supervisors;
- Improve institutional provisions safeguarding ethics and integrity in research outcomes and throughout the doctoral programmes;
- Provide academic staff with specially tailored trainings in supervising PhD students.

Evaluation

- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☒ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply with requirements

6.2. Research Support and Internationalization

- HEI has an effective system in place for supporting research, development and creative activities
- Attracting new staff and their involvement in research/arts-creative activities.
- University works on internationalization of research, development and creative activities.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The university has no clear strategic plan for its research activity. It is not clear how are the research trends and priorities selected; the system seems to be rather chaotic and depending on the obtained grants: the purpose of the grant determines the direction of the university research. The funds allocated by the university in support of the research activities are not sufficient and depend mostly on the external funding. The university spends about 1% of its yearly budget on scientific-research activities. Considering that the university has a small contingent of students and therefore does not have a big budget, this is a very low rate of funding of research activities. According to the interviews conducted by the panel, the institution is indeed planning to increase the funding of research, alongside with increasing the student numbers.

The institution supports its academic staff and students to conduct scientific research activities by offering an appropriate material and technical base, encouraging them to present papers at scientific conferences and financing or co-financing publication of scientific papers. The rules of coordinating, supporting, financing and performing scientific activities are defined by the University Internal Regulations Document.

The university funds scientific research through:

- University scientific grants;
- Funds provided to PhD students for scientific research activities carried out within the framework of the PhD Programme;
- Funds raised from government of Georgia, ministries, local government, other national and international organisations and institutions for implementing independent or joint scientific research work;
- Expenses incurred, to employees and students, for participating in scientific conferences, publishing research articles in periodical and other scientific publications.

According to the rector's order, a board evaluates the projects to be awarded with university grants. The chairperson and the members of the board are the university's academic staff members, as well as persons with doctorates who are not members of the university staff.

The rules and criteria for the evaluation of the application are defined in the special statute, which is approved by the academic board.

The SER states that in addition to the internal grants, the university supports the academic staff in raising funds from different external sources to conduct research and improve research infrastructure. For this purpose, the university provides them with consultations on legal issues, fundraising, preparation, evaluation and submission of application, etc. The HEI facilitates efficient administration of grants and supports academic staff in the preparation and submission of reports to donors. For these purposes, the scientific analytical centre and the Office of International Relations operate at the university. The Analytical Centre is more oriented towards research and the International Relations Office towards internationalisation. However, evidences of awarding academic staff with individual/group external grants were not presented to the panel during the site visit.

The Scientific Analytical Centre helps the university academic staff and students in becoming familiar with the specifics of international and national scientific funds and competition terms; raising funds and implementing scientific research projects; establishing relevant contacts for developing and implementing innovative scientific research projects, etc. The International Relations Office supports the university academic staff and doctoral students in international mobility, within the exchange program; helps professors in establishing contacts with foreign researchers in relevant fields.

As observed during the site visit, the academic staff and PhD students are more actively involved in the implementation of research projects funded by internal grants than bachelor and master students.

The expert team also revealed that the level of English communication skills among academic staff and students is very low. Therefore, there is a very weak potential for internationalisation of specific programmes in terms of staff and student exchanges, invitation of foreign academic staff, joint educational and research programmes with other universities, employment of graduates, etc.

The crucial part of internationalisation is creating a learning environment where students have opportunities to interact and share experience with students and teachers from other places in the world. So far, those aspects of internationalisation have not been explored. The programmes, in the last 5 years, admitted 0 foreign students and lecturers. Staff and students going abroad on exchanges are also low. Available data shows that there were no academic staff exchanges in the last 5 years, while the number of students going abroad for the entire faculty (6 programmes) is about 10 during the last 5 years (Erasmus Mundus projects).

Up to 10 EU funded projects have been implemented in Kutaisi University during the last 10 years. The university staff and students have participated in different conferences and seminars organised within the framework of these projects and attended short-term training courses in foreign partner universities. Such trainings were arranged in Kutaisi as well. However, there is very little utilization of internationalization results in the work of the institution, as detailed under standard 2.1.

Currently the HEI is involved in 2 Erasmus + projects, namely:

1. „Curriculum reform for promoting civic education and democratic principles in Israel and Georgia". Project Coordinator (Beneficiary Organisation) is Academic College of Gordon Education (Israel); and
2. „Investment in Caucasus and Central Asian Entrepreneurships Universities", Project Coordinator (Beneficiary Organisation): Otto-von-Geriki University of Magdeburg (Germany).

Given that the university has agreements for international exchanges and joint events, the realized internationalisation is still below its potential. Thus, the panel can only recommend that the university increases its efforts to strengthen its international dimension and provide more opportunities for students and staff since internationalisation is vital for its competitiveness and overall academic quality. Strengthening English language skills and increasing internationalisation was also the top priority improvement suggested by students, alumni and stakeholders.

Besides, the university has developed a strategy to turn the university into an institution for fundamental and applied research; one of its strategic goals is attracting and involving young members in scientific research activity, namely:

- Activating professor's assistant institute among academic personnel, involving assistants in the research work conducted by students within the master's papers and scientific research activity by academic personnel;
- Activating the institute of post-doctorates, developing and implementing mechanisms for post-doctorates' compulsory participation in scientific research activity funded by the university scientific grants;
- Developing and implementing mechanisms for the compulsory participation of master's, doctoral and post-doctoral students in target research funded by third parties.

In order to achieve each goal, the university has set up challenging tasks in the medium term (3-4 years) and has defined deadlines for each task but they are general and more specific steps are required.

To support the academic personnel and young researchers, the university apart from the research supportive tools discussed above publishes their scientific works in the scientific practical journal "Economic Profile"; it also encourages PhD students to take part in the international conferences organised by the university.

In 2015, with the students' initiative, a student research and development centre was established at Kutaisi University (KUSRADC), which functioned for one year. The Centre conducted interesting and meaningful research in problematic and priority directions of Kutaisi and Imereti region (tourism development, the main aspects of banking sector and micro-financial organisations) and made presentations.

To stimulate young scientists, since 2009, the university has introduced an internal grants system to the PhD students. It means full or partial exemption from tuition fees for one student with the highest academic results in the entrance exams. Totally six students have been granted this exemption.

Evidences/indicators

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-evaluation report; • Internationalization Policy; • International cooperation and internationalization mechanisms and analysis of their efficiency assessment; • Mechanisms for attracting foreign students and personnel; • Students and personnel survey results conducted by HEI on International cooperation and internationalization; • Public, transparent and fair procedures for funding research; • Mechanisms supporting research and creative activities; • Strategy of attracting and involving young staff in scientific research activities of the University; • The results survey results on their involvement in research/creative activities and supporting relevant initiatives; • Joint research/creative/performing activities and international cooperation; • Exchange data provided by the International Office; • Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.
<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a clear vision, priorities and strategic plan for research; • Improve staff competencies in English language by providing or facilitating access to free training; • Review international cooperation agreements and select active partners; • Increase and improve the utilization of internationalization results in the work of the institution; • Increase international mobility of students at all three educational levels, post-doctorates, academic and scientific personnel (internship abroad, other opportunities for upgrading qualification); academic staff should be directly involved in promoting teaching mobility; • Increase the presence of foreign teachers in the delivery of the programme; • Encourage academic staff to take part in individual/group grants' competitions; • Develop a more sound internationalisation strategy; • Increase the institutional involvement in applied research projects funded by international organisations.
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>6.3. Evaluation of Research Activities</p>
<p>HEI has a system for evaluating and analysing the quality of research/creative-arts activities, and the productivity of scientific-research units and academic/scientific staff.</p>
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>The Quality Assurance Office conducts the evaluation of scientific research activities in two directions: the evaluation of the activities conducted by the university as an institution and the evaluation of the scientific productivity of the academic staff.</p> <p>The university scientific research activities are evaluated annually based on the following data:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The total number of PhD students in current year, the number of PhD students in last year and the increase/decrease of this data compared to previous 2 years; 2) The number of successfully defended dissertations last year and increase / decrease in this data compared to the previous 2 years; 3) The number of bachelor's and master's program students involved in scientific research projects that were completed last year, their percentage share in the projects and the increase / decrease in these indicators compared to the previous 2 years; 4) The number of scientific articles published by the university staff in foreign and Georgian peer reviewed impact-factor scientific journals, in the proceedings of international scientific conferences and in other

electronic or printed scientific publications and the increase / decrease in this data compared to the previous 2 years;

- 5) The total amount spent by the university on scientific research activities in last year and its growth / decrease compared to the previous 2 years;
- 6) Grants and other targeted funding received during last year from a third party to finance scientific researches and its growth / decrease compared to the previous 2 years; and
- 7) The amount (separately and in total) spent on the purchase of equipment (including computers for scientific researches), field research work, participation of university staff and students in scientific conferences, organising scientific conferences, purchasing scientific literature and periodical publications and increase / decrease of these data compare to the previous 2 years.

The research conducted in 2017 revealed that the number of defended dissertations has increased compared to the previous 2 years and amounted to 43% of all defended dissertations. There is a decrease in all other indicators. The university explains this with the fact that last year none of the applications was submitted to the grant competition announced by the university. None of the academic staff representatives published articles in peer reviewed or impact-factor journals.

The Quality Assurance Office of the HEI evaluates the research productivity of the staff based on the following information:

- 1) Academic degree;
- 2) The number of scientific articles published in foreign and Georgian peer reviewed impact-factor scientific journals, in proceedings of international scientific conferences and in other electronic or printed scientific publications and presentations at scientific conferences proved by thesis published in conference materials for the last 10 years;
- 3) Participation in scientific research projects as a scientist-researcher for the last 10 years, proved by the statement issued by the head of the scientific research project or the labour agreement; and/or receiving high evaluation in relevant grant competition but not winning (80% or more);
- 4) Membership of the editorial board (council) of a scientific journal, proved by the latest issue of the journal or its photocopy;
- 5) Monographs published during the last 10 years;
- 6) The number of defended dissertations under the employee's supervision during the last 10 years;
- 7) The number of doctoral students whose scientific supervisor is the employee, etc.

The academic staff's productivity was evaluated for the first time in 2017. The university has developed a clear and transparent scoring system to assess the productivity of the staff's scientific research activity. The special forms developed by Quality Assurance Service and filled by the academic staff on their scientific activities were presented to the experts during the site-visit. The scientific productivity evaluation results are sent to each staff member separately.

The evaluation results revealed that the number of papers indexed by Thomson Reuters Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar is very low; local publications have quite high indicators; the indicator of receiving internal and international grants is also satisfactory.

Based on this research analysis, the university authorities and the strategic planning working group have developed specific measures to be undertaken within the framework of the strategic development plan for 2018-2024 for further enhancement of scientific research activities of the academic staff.

Overall, it can be said that the rate of the scientific research productivity of the academic staff is low and the university should work much more in this direction. However, the university has a clear and transparent system of evaluation for research activities. The institution evaluates and analyses the quality of research. The report on the implemented research activities is public and accessible for the staff; the evaluation results are reflected in the strategic development plan used and for the further development of research activities.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-evaluation report;
- Development Strategy of the University as a fundamental and/or applied research/creative/performance activity institution;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment Mechanism of research-creative Activity and Evaluation Results; • Personnel scientific productivity assessment system; • Meetings conducted by the panel during the site visit.
Suggestions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the research output of the academic staff in international scientific journals; • Provide more incentives for research; take effective measures to promote scientific productivity.
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements

7. Material, Information and Financial Resources

Material, information and financial resources of HEI ensure sustainable, stable, effective and efficient functioning of the institution, and the achievement of goals defined through strategic development plan.

7.1 Material Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The institution possesses or owns material resources (fixed and current assets) that are used for achieving goals stated in the mission statement, adequately responds to the requirements of educational programmes and research activities, and corresponds to the existing number of students and planned enrolment. ○ HEI offers environment necessary for implementing educational activities: sanitary units, natural light possibilities, and central heating system. ○ Health and safety of students and staff is protected within the institution. ○ HEI has adapted environment for people with special needs
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements <p>Kutaisi University possesses a 6-store building located in the centre of Kutaisi which corresponds to the requirements for implementing the educational programmes and research activities with the existing student body. The total area of the institution building is 2632.72 square meters, out of which 1149.44 square meters are used for academic purposes and 1110.43 square meters are dedicated to auxiliary areas.</p> <p>The material resources are generally sufficient for achieving the goals stated in the institutional mission. The university has three departments. The academic staff are provided with working environment in the departments of the faculty – all three departments have separate relevantly-equipped rooms. Also, all members of administrative and additional staff are provided with equipped working place in their structural sub-division.</p> <p>The building is equipped with foyer, recreation spaces, classrooms for teaching and learning activities, administrative offices, a library, archive, auditoriums, laboratories and a first aid cabinet.</p> <p>Heating is provided by the central heating system, a water heater which works on natural gas.</p> <p>The institution has separated administration and teaching areas: teaching classrooms, conference hall, professor offices (also serving as areas to provide consultations to students), teaching/research laboratories, library and other spaces fit for the educational programmes delivered by the institution, as well as separate offices dedicated to administration. All areas have windows which provide natural light and fresh air. The sanitary units are equipped with electric lights and ventilation systems. The electricity and water supplies of the building are provided by the reserve source from the electricity network.</p> <p>The university premises are under 24-hour supervision of the security service. The building and the yard are covered by CCTV systems. The building has an automatic system of fire alarm: all rooms are equipped with smoke detectors (one for each 25 m²), there is a fire-alert signal activation button on every floor. In case of smoke, sound alert turns on automatically and telephone signal is sent to the relevant numbers. The building is well-equipped with fire extinguishing items. Evacuation schemes are placed in visible places. The relevant agreement is signed with the security service provider for operational response to violations of the order (LLC Cascade).</p> <p>The medical aid cabinet is equipped and supplied with the necessary first aid items.</p> <p>There is a pleasant green environment in the yard where students and staff can relax or carry out various activities.</p>

However, during the visit of the facilities, the panel could observe several challenges across the institutional facilities and their equipment which can represent an inconvenience at the working and learning environment, which have the potential to influence the educational activities:

1. Not all classrooms are equipped with whiteboard, projectors and air conditioning;
2. Sanitary units are not available on every floor;
3. Offices dedicated to administration seem slightly overcrowded;
4. There is no cafeteria available in the building for staff and students to access during class time/working hours;
5. The university is only partially adapted to students with special needs. There are ramps for people with walking disabilities; there also is an elevator, but it is not facilitating access to all floors of the building. Also, the premises and learning resources are not adapted for people with hearing and visual impairments.

Facilities are evaluated by students through a survey; however, there is no similar instrument to evaluate the satisfaction rate of all staff since the same premises and equipment have to serve the entire academic community. As presented under standard 2.2., the survey is built in a way that does not provide enough data so as to serve as a base for improvements and does not cover all the areas of major concern. For example, the question „How would you assess the work of the university administration?” does not provide sufficient detail so as to support the institution in its quality enhancement; a „very bad” answer from a student does not tell the university if the dissatisfaction refers to library or PR and Marketing, to opening hours or attitude of staff, to quality of books or infrastructure, etc. therefore the institution cannot use the answer in improving a service in particular. Equally, the survey does not assess students satisfaction with the available sports facilities, areas for extracurricular activities, recreational spaces, etc.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-evaluation report;
- The documentation confirming ownership of Real Estate, extract from public registry;
- Documentation/inventory materials confirming ownership of property;
- Agreement with practice/research-scientific objects;
- The results of student and personnel survey on material resources;
- A document certifying the proper operation of the heating and ventilation system;
- Document certifying the standard of sanitary norms;
- Mechanisms of fire protection, medical care and order protection;
- Document certifying the security of the building;
- Document certifying fire protection security;
- Visit of the facilities;
- Meetings conducted during the site visit.

Recommendations:

- Equip all classrooms with whiteboard, projectors and air conditioning;
- Ensure sanitary units are not available on every floor;
- Revisit the areas dedicated to administration staff to ensure a sufficient, safe, comfortable and productive working environment for all employees;
- Ensure the institutional premises are fully adapted for students with special needs, not only through ramps and elevators available on all entrances and all floors, but also by offering learning resources fit for people with hearing and visual impairments;
- Ensure the university premises are evaluated by the entire academic community, through instruments that provide sufficient information to serve as a basis for improvement.

Suggestions:

- Provide cafeteria services in the building accessible for staff and students during class time/working hours.

Evaluation

- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☒ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements

<input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
7.2. Library Resources
Library environment, resources and service support effective implementation of educational and research activities, and HEI constantly works for its improvement.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>The institution has a library located on the second floor of Kutaisi University, which consists of the book storage and open areas where those interested can consult the educational resources. There also is a special place for keeping periodical publications. In the open area are also 5 computers connected to internet and a printer/scanner/photocopier, where students can access international library resources as well. However, when students were asked to find the materials in the online library, they were not familiar with how to operate with the existing international material resources. Also, when the panel members tried to check the accessibility of the online journals, it was obvious in the online search area that these links were not used before.</p> <p>The open area of the library is insufficient to accommodate different learning and studying needs: individual reading areas separated from group work activities, without disturbing each other. This matter should therefore be addressed.</p> <p>The library is open to the public every day except Sundays and legal holidays, from 9:00 to 17:00, according the rules established by the Library Regulations. The panel was slightly confused about the opening hours of the library: according to the SER, the library working time was from Monday to Saturday between 10-17; however, according to the interviews conducted by the panel, the working time was increased and is now Monday to Saturday between 10-18. While the panel understands the dynamics of such changes, it is recommended that the opening hours are clearly posted in public locations and stable over time so that the academic community knows in advance when to count on the library availability.</p> <p>The library can be used not only by the staff members, students or listeners, but also by the general members of the community. However, the library does not have clear regulations relating to the loans system: there are no clear sanctions on failure to return the books in the specified time. When addressing this matter with the library staff, the panel has learnt that in case books are not returned, the institution reaches out to the students via e-mail or phone and, in case books are still not returned, the institution pays a visit to students home, which the panel not only finds difficult to believe, but very ineffective in ensuring the integrity of the library inventory, especially since these are available to the general public as well.</p> <p>There is no security system in place to prevent loss of materials, which again is of particular concern since the library resources are available to the general public as well.</p> <p>Rules for behaviour within the library should be established, adopted, enforced and displayed in a public location to ensure maintenance of an environment conducive to effective study and research.</p> <p>The library resources include more than 12000 items, with different subjects; among them 5724 are Georgian, 1509 Russian, 1158 English and 992 electronic. 6224 GEL were spent for obtaining new library resources. The budget for 2018 budget also includes an allocation dedicated to purchase new books and resources. The library also contains small circulation textbooks and methodological materials prepared by the university staff members, which are used in the teaching of specific components of the study programs. The library resources include the main literature mentioned in the curricula of all study program. The university systematically upgrades its library resources in order to provide students and staff members with the latest scientific literature. The annual plan always contains expenses occasioned by the renewal/widening and restoration of the library resources.</p> <p>The library reading hall periodically hosts book presentations, discussions of new textbooks, meetings with authors and trainings on using library resources.</p> <p>The library has an electronic system for books accounting, which can be accessed on site and offline. However, the system is only providing an inventory of the resources of the library, but it does not clarify how many copies of a certain book are physically available and can be found in the library and how many are already on loan to other students. All loan procedures are in fact paper based, where each student has an individual file (folded A4 paper) which reflects all books they had on loan so far. Lastly, during the visit of the institutional facilities, the panel has noticed that the library staff are insufficiently qualified and skilled in information technology so that to operate a</p>

comprehensive library electronic management system, as well as to guide students and staff through electronic resources.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-evaluation report.
- Documentation/inventory materials confirming ownership of the library foundation;
- Documentation confirming involvement in the international electronic library network;
- Statistics of the use of electronic library bases;
- Mechanisms for development and renewal of library resources and services;
- Visit of the facilities;
- Meetings conducted during the site visit.

Recommendations:

- Provide sufficient areas to meet different learning needs separately (individual reading and group work without disturbing each other);
- Ensure that library opening hours are stable over time and are clearly posted in public locations;
- Clarify and regulate the library policy to specify loan periods for each category of materials and members of the community, establish clear fines for exceeding the loan periods, as well as clear guidelines for renewal policy and returning materials; these should all be disseminated in visible locations;
- Ensure an efficient follow up for overdue material;
- Establish, adopt, enforce and display rules for behaviour within the library so that to ensure maintenance of an environment conducive to effective study and research;
- Establish effective security systems to prevent loss of materials in the library;
- Eliminate the paper based system and upgrade the library electronic management system so that to provide an effective record of loans and returns, as well as a clear inventory of the library resources physically available on site;
- Ensure that the library staff are sufficiently qualified and skilled in information technology so that to operate a comprehensive library electronic management system, as well as to guide students and staff through electronic resources and libraries;
- Ensure the students and staff are trained into using the electronic learning resources, journals and publications;
- Better promote the usage of the electronic learning resources during the educational process in order to broaden students' knowledge.

Evaluation

- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☒ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply with requirements

7.3 Information Resources

- HEI has created infrastructure for information technologies and its administration and accessibility are ensured
- Electronic services and electronic management systems are implemented and mechanisms for their constant improvement are in place
- HEI ensures business continuity
- HEI has a functional web-page in Georgian and English languages.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The university electronic infrastructure contains approximately 100 computers permanently connected to internet, which are regularly checked; damaged systems are repaired or replaced. Since 2011, there has been a 40% increase in quantity of computers, but a 80% upgrade to the existing systems. All computers are equipped with an antivirus program provided by Information Technology Support Service.

According to the SER, the wireless internet network is currently covering only 20-30% of the institutional premises - reading and conference halls, as well as the university yard.

The university electronic service is provided by one server and 2 working stations. According to the interviews conducted by the panel, all electronic information of the institution is stored on this server, same as one backup of the respective data. The panel is concerned that, in case of a hazard at the location of the server, the institution will be in danger of losing some or all of its information.

From 2015, the university corporate mail services are located on google server and the number of registered users on the corporation mail has exceeded 700 (staff members, students, graduates).

The institution has a functional web-page in Georgian which provides comprehensive information about the institution and its programs; however, the English version is severely underdeveloped and does not include all information required by the NCEQE standards. For example, the higher education programs button displays bachelor only, button for catalogue of education programs opens an empty page, same as the LLL programs page, enrolment criteria/admission rules open in Georgian only, most of internal regulations are either available in Georgian or are missing completely, annual report opens in Georgian only, nothing under the research button is available in English, internationalisation button open either empty sections or documents in Georgian, etc.

In 2017, the IT Service introduced the database of registering documents; it is designed in the MS Access environment and it is located on the university server. The right to access is restricted to the members of administration, the dean, head of services and the office. In addition to the recorded documents, the archive of scanned documents is also stored on the server.

There is an e-learning platform functioning on a Moodle platform developed through a project in 2011. However, after having served the project goals, the platform was reduced to just an online support for information and learning resources for some components of the study programs provided by the institution, though not for all so as to cover the minimal need. The current number of registered users is 245.

Besides these two platforms which are only partially serving their purpose, there is no electronic student management system, no centralised assessment system, no platform to centrally host all educational resources related to the study programs at the institution, no internal administration electronic system (that would also provide hosting to all surveys conducted by the QA office) and no modern library electronic management system. Therefore, the panel can conclude that the current IT infrastructure fails to ensure the effectiveness, efficiency and accessibility of the management and educational processes at the institution.

There is no evidence of the efficiency of information system being evaluated. The panel is also concerned about the continuity of the IT service and the priority given to this area by the institutional management since the position of the Head of IT Department was vacant at the time of the site visit.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-evaluation report;
- Policy and procedures of Information Technology Management, Information Technology infrastructure;
- Agreement with the Internet provider;
- Information about electronic services and electronic control systems;
- Development mechanisms of electronic services and electronic control systems;
- Confirmation document of Domain and Hosting Certificate.
- Visit of the facilities;
- Meetings conducted during the site visit.

Recommendations:

- Improve the wireless network coverage across the university premises;
- Ensure back up files are kept in a different and secure location, preferably in a different building or off campus;
- Develop the English version of the institutional website so that to provide at least the information required by NCEQE standards;
- Develop an IT infrastructure that would ensure the effectiveness, efficiency and accessibility of the management and educational processes at the institution by providing an electronic student management system, a centralised assessment system, a platform to centrally host all educational resources related to the study programs provided by the institution, an internal administration electronic system and a modern library electronic management system;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct evaluations (or integrate in the present feedback collection instruments) of the efficiency of information system; ● Ensure the continuity of the IT services and action planning by recruiting a Head of the IT department.
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
7.4 Financial Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allocation of financial resources described in the budget of HEI is economically achievable ○ Financial standing of HEI ensures performance of activities described in strategic and mid-term action plans ○ HEI financial resources are focused on effective implementation of core activities of the institution ○ HEI budget provides funding for scientific research and library functioning and development ○ HEI has an effective system of accountability, financial management and control
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements <p>The budget of Kutaisi University has been prepared according to the university strategic plan with the involvement of its constituent structural units.</p> <p>The financial resources provided by the budget are economically viable. The income of the university is based on student tuition fees for the study programs, international fund grants, tuition fees for certification program, as well as other sources from different economic activities.</p> <p>The revenue of the institution has decreased during the last five years, but the current situation is stable enough for the actual operations and the defined strategic goals. The university has a good financial position as the accumulated profit amounts to approximately 20% of the budget. The expenses are planned optimally. Income and cash flows can cover the current and planned expenses for the successful implementation of the core activities of the institution. The costs are linked to strategic priorities and are leaving room for future development. Expenses are planned along with planning budget revenues.</p> <p>The budget priorities of Kutaisi University for 2018 include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Development of infrastructure; ● Qualification of employees; ● Implementation of educational programs relevant to the requirements of modern labour market; ● Improvement of the quality of learning/teaching and research; ● Development of student services; ● Quantitative growth of student contingent for students with high potential. <p>In a budget document the university has provided, they indicate the strategic objective of supporting scientific-research activities in 2018, but in a general budget file the institution only projects the following expenses: University Scientific grants, Publishing Scientific reports and Scientific Conferences. The institution does not have any cost projections for staff to conduct scientific researches or to write scientific thesis. The university does have some financial resources allocated for scientific activities, but these should be better allocated so as to successfully support students and staff in their scientific research activities.</p> <p>In spite of the optimal resource allocation, the institution needs a faster financial growing. According to the meetings conducted by the panel, the institution plans to improve the revenues of the organization and, consequently, increase the funding for organisational development.</p>
Evidences/indicators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-evaluation report; ● Information about financing sources; ● HEI budget; ● Finance dynamics of the last 5 years, financial accounts of current and pre-reporting periods; ● Rules and form of distribution, delegation and accountability of responsibilities; ● The document of implementation of Financial Management and Control System.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings conducted during the site visit.
Recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better allocate financial resources to scientific activities so as to successfully support students and staff in their scientific research activities.
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements